

**LIMINALITY, TRUST, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMALE PEER-TO-PEER
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE: A NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION OF
THE SIX SISTERS CONSORTIUM**

by

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The central focus of this dissertation is a narrative interpretation of stories from a set of female Confucius Institutes directors in the United States and a reconsideration of their experiences regarding how they negotiate working from the liminal spaces of their personal and professional lives. For many women in the workplace, the idea of being in a permanent state of liminality is profoundly real as they continually redefine themselves within the structure of various and competing systems. Using a critical feminist perspective, I consider liminality as an ongoing state for the women of the Six Sisters Consortium and use their voices and their narrated experiences as the means to better understand ways women and women leaders thrive in gendered, international, and/or intercultural in-between places. I believe that for some women there exists a state of perpetual liminality despite gains in the United States in educational attainment, entrance into high level jobs, and shifting notions within the feminist perspective on gender and equity. Using a coherence theory of truth claims, I examine the stories of the Six Sisters in situ in order to understand how trust, liminality, and voice intersect within their lived experiences and also in relation to the greater literature on feminist principles of the significance of peer-to-peer relationships and meaning-making.

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1.0 FORGROUNDING THE RESEARCH

The central focus of this dissertation is a narrative interpretation of stories from a set of women Confucius Institutes directors in the United States and the reconsideration of their experiences regarding how they negotiate working from the *liminal* spaces of their personal and professional lives. For many women in the workplace, the idea of being in a permanent state of liminality is profoundly real as they continually redefine themselves within the structure of various and competing systems. Using a critical feminist perspective, I consider liminality as an ongoing state for the women of the Six Sisters Consortium and use their voices and their narrated experiences as the means to better understand ways women and women leaders thrive in gendered, international, and/or intercultural in-between places while they continue to negotiate and renegotiate themselves with and into the greater world.

I believe that for some women there exists a state of perpetual liminality despite gains in the United States in educational attainment, entrance into high level jobs, and shifting notions within the feminist perspective on gender and equity. Using a coherence theory of truth claims, I examine the narratives of the Six Sisters *in situ*, yet consider their experiences in relation to the greater literature on feminist principles of the significance of relationships and meaning-making. Because I believe a narrative inquiry “is not the experience of the other that we are studying; rather, we are studying our experience as inquirers in relation with the experience of

participants” (Clandinin & Caine, et al., 2016, p. 25), I will frame this inquiry by writing my own story into the analysis from the beginning.

1.1 PERSONAL BACKGROUND

The impetus for this research comes from my own personal experiences dealing with *liminal* spaces and working from “in-between” and the intersection of that space with my relationships and friendships with other women with whom I work. This analysis focuses on a particular group of women, the “Six Sisters” consortium within the Confucius Institutes, a group that came together from the shared experience of starting and managing a Chinese language initiative in the United States. To foreground this study, I situate the dialogue within my own personal and professional development and consider the possibility that women learn, grow, and develop as individuals and professionals through their relationships to other women. I do this by framing the scholarship within the concept of how these women negotiate the liminal space in their lives and look at how other women intersect within that space to impact their own sense of development and self. This research inquiry has its impetus in both my childhood and my own scholarly pursuit of understanding China.

I grew up the dependent of a career Air Force pilot. My father was a three war veteran (WWII, Korea, Vietnam) and within that family story is the sub-story of moving and change, uncertainty, and adventure. By the time I was in high school I had lived in two foreign countries and five states, and had been enrolled in nine different schools. Being open to new experiences and yet always being on the verge of leaving for the next place was part of the family dynamic.

The concept of liminality, for me, came from the notion that as a military dependent I was in a permanent state of in-between because who I was and what I was to be was fluid, ambiguous, and malleable according to each situation. Growing up, I was not of the place where I was living (Germany, New York, Kansas), nor was I a member of the U.S. military. I lived on bases or within communities, but my presence was temporary and my “community” was forever shifting. I became an adaptable child but always understood that wherever we lived was not really “home” and the sporadic trips back east to my parent’s western Pennsylvania farm town only served to solidify that feeling.

I realize that my own interest in and relationship to the concept of liminality has evolved and changed as I have evolved and changed as well. As a young girl, ambivalence, and in this way, the emerging concept of a liminal state, meant I understood that my life as an Air Force dependent was in a constant state of transition and negotiation, with myself and the greater world, and with others within that framework. As I grew up I saw each new place as a kind of anthropologic experiment where I would try and understand this new land (Virginia, Texas, Florida), but always from the outside looking in.

When I moved to Asia in high school, the notion of being not “of” or “from” became even more personal and real as I confronted Chinese culture as a young foreigner and began what became my life-long interest in China. Luckily, my experience in Taiwan was also punctuated by deep and committed friendships as others I met (both Chinese and foreign-born) also learned to negotiate this space of living between two sets of cultural norms. The school I attended was an American school, but the student body was diverse and global. For the foreign students, there was a sense of living between Taiwan and their native countries; for our Chinese classmates

there was the sense of living in their own country but learning and going to school with foreigners.

In my early 30's, as a young mother, I wrote an interdisciplinary master's thesis which explored the concept of liminality much as Turner (1964) considered the meaning: as an impermanent state of transition whereby rituals or events are employed to mark a symbolic rite of passage (p.46). Bar and bat mitzvahs, funerals, wakes, and weddings are all examples of ritualized events which symbolize the leaving of one world and entering into another. My master's thesis (Ferrier, 1987) concentrated on considering rituals a Chinese bride experienced on her wedding day and how the rituals associated with marriage served to separate a bride from her natal home and incorporate her into her husband's family and lineage. In that research, I used the concept of liminality to understand how ritual was used to reinforce the bride's transformation from someone's daughter to someone's wife and daughter-in-law. Looking back, I believe this research resonated with me as I considered my new role as wife, mother, and partner, and studying Chinese rituals and brides helped me to better understand my own positionality within my new family structure.

When I became director of the Confucius Institute for my current institution, the concept of liminality came back to me once again. This time, from the perspective of a woman in mid-career, I understood things from yet another perspective as I struggled to establish an institute with a foreign university and government within the structure of a U.S. institution of higher education. Being within that liminal state, once again, created the kind of tension and uncertainty that comes from being in a constant state of flux, particularly as I negotiated the terms between competing and not complementary systems such as those of Chinese governmental linear bureaucracy with the more non-linear structure of U.S. higher education.

The concept of friendships and peer-to-peer relationships in a work environment came to me as I worked through the issues regarding how to run an organization as complex and confounding as the Confucius Institute. As I turned, over and over again, to the women who were in parallel leadership positions in other Confucius Institutes, it occurred to me that my dependence and reliance on a peer-set of women is something many women depend upon in the workforce. I came to believe that my experience with peers might be part of a larger trend occurring elsewhere in the workplace and thus worthy of further study. My original thesis was to center on how the Six Sisters relationships to one another helped us each to redefine and negotiate ourselves as leaders of organizations. But through the interviews and the gathering of these women's stories, what emerged as the real value of this investigation was situated within the way in which these women resolved, solved, engaged, and supported one another at levels that were both professional and personal. By framing the research around how each woman in this study negotiates the liminal state as they experience it, I discovered the importance of trust and friendships for this group of women and what their experiences tell us about the role feminist praxis plays regarding how women thrive in long-term liminal states.

The women of this analysis are colleagues and friends; they are partners in this journey as we have all struggled to organize and run our own piece of a large and complex international start-up. I know from my own experience that my accomplishments with our own Confucius Institute are directly tied to the wisdom, support, and encouragement of these women. These stories are my story and theirs, because, from the beginning, we have been in this together.

1.2 OVERVIEW

I organize the following chapters to ground my considerations in both theory and method. Chapter one foregrounds this research by situating the problem of liminality for the women of this study in terms of significance and origin. Because I am using a narrative interpretation to organize this study, my voice as a researcher is front and center to the interpretation, which is why I use my own personal experience with the concept of liminality as background to this study. Chapter two outlines how I frame the interpretation within the epistemological and ontological methods. In Chapter two I also describe my reasons for the use of a narrative inquiry as the best suited for this particular study and outline the significance of portraiture, narratives, storytelling, and metaphors as part of the “thick” description I use throughout this dissertation. Chapter three is the literature review which considers the scholarly framework and concepts I introduce, including the role of feminism in this interpretation, what I mean when I use the term liminality, and how trust, and the concept of friendships, voice, and power intersect to inform this research.

Chapters four through nine are my narrative interpretations of the interviews I held with my five female participants, and the synthesis of my own intersection and considerations regarding how I negotiate in the liminal state. In chapters four through eight the voices of my participants come forth through my use of direct quotes and paraphrasing from the interview transcripts. These chapters also incorporate my inductive interpretations of what they said *in situ* as a means to understand their lived experiences within the liminal state.

Chapter ten is a synthesis of this study and the insights and conclusions I have drawn from working with these narratives. Chapter ten includes the significance of emergent themes, the power of female peer-to-peer relationships, the impact of the concept of *communitas* for the

women of this study, and the way in which feminist principles of the power of the collective have real and significant value to this research.

2.0 UNDERTAKING THE STUDY

The word *liminality* comes from the Latin term *limen*, or “threshold.” In this analysis, and as I describe in more detail below, I use the terms *liminal* and *liminality* to mean a permanent state of unresolved transition and continual renegotiation whereby the full transition from one “place” or transformation of one’s self never occurs but becomes an enduring and permeable state of being. This state is different from being marginalized (though marginalization can occur) and has more in common with concepts of borderland theory (Diener & Hagen, 2010), where boundaries are not set in stone to mark existence and experience in a binary fashion.

2.1 FRAMING THE ANALYSIS

My interest in the concept of “permanent liminality” is more aligned to Szokolczai (2000) where “liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases of this sequence (of separation, liminality, and reaggregation) become frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame” (p. 220). In the historic sense, many communities have had features of permanent liminality including monasticism or court societies (Szokolczai, 2000, p. 220), or for me as a military dependent, but in the modern sense Giesen (2009) argues, “modernity is a continuous transgression of boundaries and breaking down of traditions, and therefore involves a deep-

rooted sense of ambivalence” (p. 242). Liminality as a theoretical construct resists binary definition and opens the door for ambivalence to become a permanent state of being.

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

From my previous research and years of considering women in liminal spaces, this research has brought me to believe that for many women the idea of being in a permanent state of liminality is profound and real as they work to define themselves within the structure of various and competing systems. Using the construct of liminality as a framework, this research offers a new lens by which to consider what is missing from other research paradigms regarding women, women leaders, and adult female peer relationships. As I state below, there is a lack of literature regarding female peer-to-peer relationships in the workplace and the significance with which women place on these relationships. Using a critical feminist perspective, I consider liminality as an ongoing state for the women of the Six Sisters Consortium and use their voices and their experiences as an example to understand and define ways in which many women live these in-between places while they continue to negotiate and renegotiate themselves with and into the greater world.

I believe, much as Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra (2015) do that liminality can be spatial and temporal (p. 40). Yet, I also believe there is a perpetual space where women learn to negotiate the competing forces in the battle for balance in their lives, a struggle with conflicting messages about who they are in society, or simply within the lived experience of what it means to maneuver in-between. According to Mälksoo (2015), the idea of perpetual liminality emerges as a condition characteristic of societies that have long lived ‘on the limit’ and thus proven quite

unable to conclusively surpass the experience, in spite of their apparent entrance into the phase of societal reaggregation” (p. 232). I believe some women experience this state despite gains in the United States in educational attainment, entrance into high level jobs, and shifting notions within the feminist perspective on gender and equity.

I argue that the examples from the Six Sisters Consortium are indicative of stories women tell regarding how they negotiate between work and family life, between personal and professional concerns, and between structures and within systems that are not established for them to naturally succeed.

For me, negotiating from in-between had its impetus in my transient childhood and impermanent, nomadic existence. But as I have evolved and passed through my own life transitions, I have come to question the deeper implications of this concept and will use this study to consider liminality as it pertains to feminist praxis. The stories of the Six Sisters are stories of the negotiations of self with systems, and of self with others, but also allows us to consider these stories as a way of understanding what it means to consider liminality as it pertains to modern societal norms and standards.

2.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between women’s peer-to-peer relationships and how they negotiate the liminal space in their personal and professional lives?
2. What do women’s peer-to-peer friendships tell us about the significance of non-formal learning between peers in the workplace?

2.4 EPISTOMOLOGY

The epistemology of this research will draw on a coherency theory related to truth claims. Coherence theory assumes, “truth consists in coherence with a set of beliefs, or with a set of propositions held to be true” (Young, 2016, p. 1). This means that because I am working with a group of women who work in a relatively small, defined field, the concept of what is claimed to be true to us may or may not be what is considered to be true to those outside of this group. This is significant because this epistemology allows me to consider the narratives of the women of this study without attempting to make a claim regarding what “all” or “most” women might experience. An empirical generalization is not assumed in these truth claims. Unlike correspondence theory which assumes “that truth is a relational property involving a characteristic relation to some portion of reality” and is often “associated with truth as correspondent to, or with, a fact” (David, 2016, p. 2), coherence theory relates to a shared set of beliefs to which a group adheres and are reflected in the result related to the truth claims.

Within the Confucius Institute network, for example, a shared set of beliefs might be around our knowledge and understanding of the Chinese system of hierarchy and bureaucracy which impact the way in which we make decisions. Truth is shared by what we believe to be true about Chinese culture and systems. To those outside the organization, decisions that we each make with this collective and/or individuated knowledge might be believed to be based in fact, but within the group our shared beliefs, based on our years of consistent experience with the Chinese government and Chinese societal norms, become the truth by which we guide our decisions.

This is not to say the beliefs are not “true” so much as to emphasize that coherence theory does not assume the beliefs must be associated with more widely accepted version of reality

outside the group. As Scott (1991) outlines in *The Evidence of Experience*, “making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logistics; we know that difference exists, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don’t understand it as relationally constituted” (p. 779). While Scott’s interpretation is to acknowledge the shifting way in which historical processes can be examined, the underlying treatise of the argument is the validation of experience as being normative and significant. Scott further explains, “experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, nor the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced” (p. 779-780).

My own experience and the stories the women of this study tell are genuine in as much as the truth as we assume it to be is within the confines of the beliefs and experiences of those within the consortium. This interpretivist approach, according to Garman (2006), calls for “interpretivist portrayals [to] strive for *coherence*, which provide the reader with a vivid picture and the meanings about the experience under study” (p. 2). My assumption is that the experiences of this particular group do have relevance to other women in the greater world as an example of stories regarding feminist notions of agency and are not confined to just the group to which they belong. Although I will not attempt to generalize within empirical truth claims, my belief is by examining the narratives of this particular group using a coherence theory of truth as a guiding principle, I can better understand and articulate a process and significance of sororal/peer-to-peer relationships in the workplace for women in other settings as well.

2.5 THEORETICAL LENS

In this research I use a post-modern constructivist paradigm as the theoretical lens. Unlike positivist research where the goal of social science inquiry is to remove context and voice to focus on identification and documentation of social problems (Mertens, 2010, p. 11), the constructivist paradigm sees knowledge as socially constructed. A post-modern interpretive constructivist paradigm as described by Villaverde (2008), Rubin and Rubin (2012), and Mertens (2010), emphasizes the importance of the researchers' expression of her own subjectivity and agency. Contrary to modernist systems of thought which support the notion of certitudes and indisputable truths, postmodern refers to resistance to essentializing within modernist systems and abandoning epistemological basis for any claims to truth (Mertens, 2010, p.9). As Crotty (1998) further outlines, "instead of espousing clarity, certitude, wholeness, and continuity, postmodernism commits itself to ambiguity, relativity, fragmentation, particularity, and discontinuity" (p. 18).

In addition, a postmodern constructivist paradigm assumes and supports an epistemology which ascribes value to the construction, experience, and discussion of the research itself (Villaverde, 2008, p. 107) and emphasizes the importance of reflexivity in the research process. Reflexivity, an important aspect of this research, will focus on my ability to step back and interpret/reinterpret data based on the evolution of my own view of what is being learned and heard in relation to my own self perceptions and historical and structural constraints (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 123). An interpretive constructivist paradigm is one in which, "the core of understanding is learning what people make of the world around them, how people interpret what they encounter, and how they assign meanings and values to events or objects" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). Critical reflexivity applies to my involvement both as researcher and insider

in that the process by which I understand and acknowledge my own standpoint, and subsequently recognize my own positionality, plays a role in how I contextualize the data (Lincoln, 1995).

The concept of reflexivity was first considered by Cooley (1956) who called the researcher-participant positionality “sympathetic introspection,” or the notion that immersion in a social context and prolonged exposure with participants can lead to a kind of awakening within the researcher that warrants an empathic and emotional “awakening” through nuances (Witz, 2007). Cooley’s concept as essentialist portraiture, or the ability to “absorb” the participants’ reality through the subjective, inner world of the participant contributes to the analysis and micro-analysis of what the subject says (p. 242). As I explore more below, context is one of the key ways in which intellectual content within narratives and portraiture is framed and creates a reference point of the sphere (time and space and placing actors within) of action as a reference point to help decipher or decode the experience of my participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 41) and of my own experience and journey as well.

2.6 METHODOLOGY

The design of this research focuses on narrative inquiries based on several interviews per person and conversations with the Six Sister participants, research and field notes, and observations from meetings and other experiences with the participants over the last six years. Storytelling, personal narratives, portraiture, and narrative interpretation are incorporated to develop an overall sense of the individual’s experience as it relates to the larger themes introduced in this thesis.

2.7 RESEARCH APPROACH: NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING AS METHOD

The design for this study is a qualitative/interpretive study of the Six Sisters Consortium to examine women's own experiences leading a multi-stakeholder organization in the United States. Specifically, I use a hermeneutic narrative inquiry approach to explore the relationships and stories of my own experiences and those of five women directors who oversee U.S. Confucius Institutes to understand ways in which women develop networks amongst themselves and to consider what these networks mean to each participant. This narrative inquiry examines the interplay between research theory, experiences, conversations, and research questions by examining the stories the women tell as the research methodology. Much as Smith and Heshusius (1986) define method, I use the concept of *logic-of-justification* as the focus of this interpretation (p. 8), meaning, as Smith and Heshusius elaborate, "the focus here is not on techniques but on the elaboration of logical issues and ultimately, on the justifications that inform practice...This conceptualization involves such basic questions as, What is the nature of social and educational reality? What is the relationship of the investigator to what is investigated? And, how is truth to be defined?" (p. 8).

Specifically, I employ a narrative interpretation which employs various methods that cover both explicit narrative manifestations (such as the specific story that is told) and the underlying logic or organizing rationale which justifies the narrative. This method considers both structures (that which exists within systems) and context (that which can change, vary, and is individuated) as a hybrid synthesis of truth claims (Oikkonen, 2013, p. 297). I use the distinction outlined by Oikkonen (2013) between structure and context as understanding "structure as the persistent tendencies that allow certain kinds of discourses to take shape, that push narrative in particular directions," and "context as the culturally and historically specific conditions through

which knowledge is produced and interpreted, conditions that cannot be separated from the theoretical and methodological choices in the research process. As structure privileges permanence and context favours change, the narrative site between structure and context is characterized by unresolved tensions” (p. 297).

This *bricolage* approach to stories, metaphors, portraitures and narratives is used to understand my multi-layered lived-experiences as a member of this group and those of the women of this study. Unlike a quantitative inquiry which seeks certitude based on matching conditions which correspond to a given world, this qualitative inquiry is part of a constant (hermeneutical) interpretation of interpreting others (Smith & Heshusius, 1986, p. 9) within a coherence theory of truth claims. I believe, much as Piantanida and Garman (2009) explain, “research authority also resides in method-or as we prefer, the logic of justification-that informs one’s inquiry approach” (p. 11).

2.7.1 PERSONAL NARRATIVES

I use the ontological and epistemological perspective of narrative inquiry as described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who argue that, “the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). In this research I use the terms *story* and *narrative* interchangeably to locate the personal experiences of the participants.

I use the term *metaphor* to mean metaphors as part of “thick description,” or a method of explaining with as much detail as possible the reason behind human actions (Geertz, 1973; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and thus as a tool by which I can more deeply understand my subjects.

Interpreting metaphors as part of thick description, according to Thomas Steger (2007), is a “means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another” outside the stereotypical usages of poetry and literature (p. 3). Metaphors within personal narratives can reveal deeper clues about subjects by highlighting ideological attachments, communicating the inexpressible (Geertz, 1973), or can be a lens which provides insights and data about the subject and his/her emotions, beliefs, and self-concepts (Steger, 2007, p. 5).

Narrative as a methodology has its roots in psychotherapy (White & Epsen, 1990) and is often related to identity studies. For the purpose of this research I acknowledge that identity and story-telling are often intertwined (McAdams, 2001, p. 101) however, in this interpretation I try to avoid drawing conclusions regarding how my participants view their stories as part of their personal identities except where otherwise noted. I recognize that identity is an important aspect of considering one’s place in an overall narrative, but I believe the ability to adequately address identity here is outside the scope of this research. I consider the significance my participants place on their narratives as a way of understanding how they perceive the truth with their experiences and acknowledge, where appropriate, the way in which the larger story they tell as being part of who they see themselves to be.

I assume within this research that my own experience as a member of the directors of the Confucius Institutes, and as a participant/observer has relevance and I acknowledge my own participation through my own story, active reflection, and reconsideration of the data as I continue to consider and reexamine the interplay of research questions, theory, conversation, experience, and process. As Clandinin, Caine, et al. (2016) acknowledge, “it is not the experience of the other that we are studying; rather, we are studying our experience as inquirers in relation with the experiences of participants” (p. 15). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further

explain, “narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation” (p. 189). In this way, I acknowledge the fluid nature of a narrative inquiry and the importance to continue within the constantly comparative analysis of the data in relation to my original research questions and epistemology.

Below I give a more detailed explanation of the narrative inquiry approach including how personal narratives, portraiture, metaphors, and dialogic meaning all are interwoven within this body of research to give a picture of my interviewees in a multifaceted way.

2.7.2 PORTRAITURE

George and Louise Spindler (1997) note in their book *Education and Cultural Process*, “as humans we learn culturally constructed dialogue as children “and continue learning it all our lives as our circumstances change” (p. 51). Personal narratives, the stories people tell about themselves or others, are a central part of this research. Through both formal and informal interviews, and observation, I use a narrative inquiry to understand my participants own stories, view how they each construct their own reality, and interpret why what each says is of significance. As background to this research I outline below several methods including portraiture, the use of metaphors, and the nature of dialogical construction, to outline how narrative inquiry can be used to frame and situate personal stories within a post-modern constructivist paradigm as it is relevant to this research.

Portraiture, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in their book *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, is a research methodology which seeks to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying

the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (p. 3). Portraiture as a means of scholarly inquiry is one in which the personal narratives of an individual take center stage as the means by which to frame and understand relationships, human experiences, and organizational life (p. 138). The purpose of using portraiture over other research methodologies is to build a sense of community and commonality of purpose which evolve through the particular story of an individual (much like ethnography) but in a way which humanizes the experience by giving voice to and contextualizing that individual’s experience. Portraiture assumes a co-creation of the narrative between the researcher and the individual (p. 4). Rather than create distance between researcher and subject, portraiture depends upon and extends the relationships beyond being a vehicle for data gathering into the human dimension of ethical, empirical research design (p. 138).

As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain, the challenges of intimacy, rapport, and reciprocity can complicate the research process but this very relationship facilitates authentic findings to emerge from authentic relationships (p. 138). Portraiture as a research paradigm assumes that the process and product is dialectical in that the researcher and the researched, through collecting and interpreting data, work together in rendering the final product (p. xvii). Thus, data collection, analysis, and narrative development are key features of portraiture as a research methodology which facilitates in-depth interpretation of communication and meaning, and as a vehicle to verify theoretical relationships (Altheide, 1987). Portraiture contextualizes the documentation of the human experience and requires an understanding of the subject and his/her world *in situ*, meaning from within the way in which the participants themselves have an experience in particular time and space (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.43). Through portraiture I continually strive to seek a balance between the *emic* (internal, personal, group held

beliefs) and the *etic* (external, observational, and continually comparative) experience of my participants and myself (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 43-44).

2.7.2.1 FIVE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF PORTRAITURE

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), there are five essential features of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. Each of these features is prominent in my interviews with my participants and taken together help me to break down aspect of understanding narrative from my participant's perspective. As mentioned above, context is a central component of understanding each participant's experience *in situ* and helps to lay the ground for other ways for me to interpret meaning.

2.7.2.2 CONTEXT

Several authors have written about the significance of context in social science research in general, and ethnographic research specifically (Altheide, 1987; Heath & Street, 2008; Mertens, 2010; Spindler & Spindler, 1997). According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, (1997) "portraitists view human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting" (p. 41). Context thus is the map, framework, reference point, and ecological sphere in which the researcher comes to know and understand his/her participant (p. 41). In a constructivist paradigm context is central to understanding the participant in time and space and allows the researcher a framework to decode gestures, nuances, and behaviors in relation to the setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41). In contrast to a positivist approach where context is seen as distorting the research and where the context is viewed as something that must be controlled (a laboratory or method to standardize and isolate variables), constructivists view context as a way in which to navigate and understand her participant within a particular setting (p. 42-43).

According to Oikkonon (2013), there is a difference between narrative analysis and other methods in that there is a distinct relationship between structure and context in narrative analysis (p. 297). Oikkonon describes, “structure as the persistent tendencies that allow certain kinds of discourses to take shape, that push narrative in particular directions. I view context as the culturally and historically specific conditions through which knowledge is produced and interpreted, conditions that cannot be separated from the theoretical and methodological choices in the research process. As structure privileges permanence and context favours change, the narrative site between structure and context is characterized by unresolved tensions” (p. 297). Structure, then can be seen as the framework which exists within systems and context is seen as that which addresses changes and variations as experienced by individuals. In this analysis, I frame the tension between structure and context within feminist critiques of systems which do not always favor women (such as the within the Confucius Institutes where there are more male directors than female) and the contextualized experiences of my participants who negotiate within the system.

2.7.2.3 VOICE

Because of the interactive nature of portraiture and the dependency on interviewing and observation, voice is a key aspect of portraiture methodology. The voice of my participants as much as my voice are central in the choices I make when going over field notes and interviews. What to include or omit of what was said or observed becomes part of my own relationship to the data and to the person being studied. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) acknowledge, “the portraiture’s voice is everywhere—overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes” (p. 85). Yet as much as the researcher’s own voice is central to the research, I must also be aware not to overshadow the

participant's voice as well (p. 85). Voice then becomes a form of witness, a method of interpretation, a preoccupation for authenticity, and an autobiographical coda by which to understand the participants (p. 85). By telling the story of my colleagues, I immediately move that story into something that is no longer owned by my colleagues, but moves into the sphere of construction and co-construction between myself and my interviewees (p. 118).

I believe one of the advantages to portraiture is the open acknowledgment of the co-construction of meaning which a researcher states as part of the methodology. For example, in *Translated Woman*, Behar (1993) concedes that her story of Esperanza is as much an ethnographic exploration of the life of a Mexquitic woman as it is the telling of how the two women became "the mediums for each other's stories" (p. 14). Behar admits that through the process of telling Esperanza's *historia* there emerged a kind of *meta-historia*, which was a forging of Esperanza's voice with Ruth's own voice (p. 14). Through the process of understanding and engaging with Esperanza and Esperanza's life story, Behar appears as both a participant and a critic of her intellectual journey as a feminist and research scholar. I believe within this analysis, much like Behar's experience, my own voice and the voice of my participants are also similarly interwoven to give depth to this *meta-story*, or *historia*.

2.7.2.4 RELATIONSHIP

As mentioned above, the story of Esperanza and Ruth Behar (1993), is as much a story of the life of Esperanza as it is the story of Behar herself and the relationship Behar had with Esperanza. I believe one of the dilemmas of using portraiture as a research methodology is the intimate nature of portraiture, which precludes a distancing between researcher and subject and can make portraiture both compelling and messy. In social science research this lack of distance can be seen as a lack of objectivity or rigor which would mean it is incumbent upon me as the

researcher to develop methodology which ensures validity (or the meaningfulness of the research methodology) in what is experienced and recorded. Validity, as outlined by Mertens (2010) can include *methodological validity* (that which takes into consideration the soundness or trustworthiness of methods of inquiry with regards to measurement instruments, procedures, and logic), *interpersonal validity* (based in the soundness or trustworthiness of interpersonal interactions), and *consequential validity* (or the soundness of change exerted on systems by evaluation and the extent to which those changes are just) (p. 83). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain relationships in this way:

Relationship building is at the center of portraiture. It is a complex, subtle, dynamic process of navigating the boundaries between self and other, distance and intimacy, acceptance and skepticism, receptivity and challenge, and silence and talk. And it is the challenging process of negotiating the often conflicting demands and responsibilities of ethics, empiricism, and emotion (p. 158).

Because fieldwork is dependent upon the quality of the relationships that are developed, “fieldwork simply will not generate good data and interesting analyses without personal investment in the relationships in the field” (Coffey, 1999, p. 40). Creating a working rapport and level of trust with my colleagues is central to portraiture, but doing so as an observer or outsider was not something that was a part of this research. Obtaining and retaining trust, reciprocity, rapport, personal commitment, and even friendship, along with the social dynamics of those relationships, are often at play through my research process (p. 41).

To have an authentic interpretation of my participants’ life requires both intimacy and distance, objectivity and reflexivity, and a realization that the relationship is both private and public (p. 57). I use the term *authentic* to mean as close to a reliable interpretation of qualitative

data as possible, with careful documentation of my field experience. In my field notes I had a moment where I recognized this careful balance: “I realize I am definitely co-constructing meaning with my participants. I think my question asking is getting better, and I am able to move from one set of ideas to another or build from what is said but still draw back to the concepts of trust and liminal spaces” (Field note, May 18, 2017). In this way, through the constant interpretation/reinterpretation of notes to theory to relationships, I continually reconsidered my participant’s stories.

Understanding that those who are subjects of research have less to gain from the relationship than the researcher, and that the relationship is somewhat transactional, means the rules that bind relationships within a research field are different than purely personal relationships (Coffey, 1999, p. 57). Relationships in the field require considering ethical and moral dilemma from both intimate and methodological perspectives which can work toward emphasizing the embodiment of field work as *work*, rather than just relationships (p. 57). The paradox for good qualitative research is to determine where the boundaries are drawn between friend and colleague to offer structure, coherence, and focus to that work (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 159).

2.7.2.5 EMERGENT THEME

A theoretical framework is necessary both before and after the development of a portrait in order to understand the data. How the material is analyzed, organized, and considered will ultimately determine how data is presented. Themes are a way in which the researcher reflects upon the material to bring interpretive “insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.185). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis outline five ways in which a portraitist constructs emergent themes and synthesis: repetitive themes which

form a collective expression; resonant metaphors which illuminate the subjects' experiences and realities; cultural or ritual continuity that are important to organizational community and continuity; triangulation to weave together threads of data from various sources; and constructed themes that emerge from seemingly contrasting or dissident experiences (p. 193). Within this research several emergent themes came through my participant's stories, including the notion of isolation and the concept of positioning themselves, both of which I address more closely in the conclusion.

Because the nature of portraiture is a co-construction of the narrative, my task as the researcher is to allow the process to be both iterative and generative. In iterative research methodology themes emerge inductively, or from the ground up based on what is found in the data (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 15). Even though I developed an intellectual and ideological framework before entering the field through a research plan, it was important to anticipate changes to that plan and be open to dialogical cues that shifted the findings of the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, pl. 186). The earlier articulation of assumptions and theories deductively informs this research and gives a basis from which to compare, contrast, reflect upon, and reconsider the portraiture (p. 186). Emergent themes came about through the stories of my colleagues and are based upon what was said in context, as well as my own interpretation of the data based on prior and acquired knowledge and field notes.

2.7.2.6 AESTHETIC WHOLE

The process of developing portraiture is as much about attention to minutia (subtleties of language, gestures, setting) as it is about the aesthetic whole. Both the micro and macro aspects of portraiture are necessary to put into perspective the "hard edges of classification in contrast to the blur of human experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.215). The aesthetic whole,

as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis outline, the “gestalt,” is a less systematic and sequential activity than the naming of emergent themes (p. 244), however, only through the development of an aesthetic whole can a “credible” and “believable” narrative emerge (p. 245). The final portrait is the aesthetic whole with all its ambiguities, frailties and contrasting structures, which, though order and sequence, I create coherence and cohesion. Through conception of the whole, structure and sequencing of themes, the form in which the story evolves and is revealed, I work the data into a complete whole (p. 247).

2.7.3 PORTRAITURE AS NARRATIVE

The pulling together of the aesthetic whole is a process I used to collect the various threads of the individual and collective experiences of my participants to identify and articulate the narrative. Because a narrative interpretation emerges based on relationships and co-creation between the researcher and her subject, the use of the words “I,” and “me,” to tell the story are part of my co-constructive process.

The acknowledgement of my voice as the researcher in the narrative represents a turn in social science research that began in the 1960’s as a means to humanize social science research by focusing on life stories and personal experiences of people suffering from poverty, sexism, and other social and cultural dilemmas (Chase, 2005, p. 652). As a researcher who adopts portraiture as a methodology I avoid referring to those in my study as subjects or actors, but refer to them in personal terms and with names which fully recognizes the relationship I have with them and the emotional energy of the interaction. In this way, narratives allow readers to “think with and feel with a story, rather than explicitly analyzing its meaning” (Frank, 1995). Narrative, thus, covers both the explicit narrative expression (the story) and the underpinnings of

that story (the organizing principles and the rational that give the story shape) (Oikkonen, 2013, p. 245).

2.7.4 METAPHORS

Similar to portraiture, metaphors are a way to understand the deeper cultural, symbolic, or internal meaning individuals or cultural groups assign to personal narratives. Symbolic anthropology, as proposed by the foundational work of Geertz (1973) is, "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). The goal of a portraitist is to become a cultural insider to be able to recognize metaphors as both symbolic and emotional cues to culturally specific nuances within an individual's narratives or actions. I define a cultural insider as a researcher who may or may not be an actual member of the group being studied but who possess in-depth, culturally-specific knowledge of the group.

Metaphors can be seen as part of "thick description," or a method of explaining with as much detail as possible the reason behind human actions (Geertz, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and thus as a tool by which a researcher can more deeply understand her subject. Interpreting metaphors as part of thick description, according to Thomas Steger (2007), is a "means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another" outside the common usages of poetry and literature (p. 3). Metaphors within personal narratives can reveal deeper clues about subjects by highlighting ideological attachments, communicating the inexpressible (Geertz, 1973), or be a lens which provides particular insights and data about the subject and his/her emotions, beliefs, and self-concepts (Steger, 2007, p. 5).

For example, in my work in China, the term *xinren* (信任), or “trust” has specific implications. An individual who is considered *xinren* is someone who can be depended upon implicitly, acts in good faith, and will deliver upon their word without question. *Xinren* implies status within society in that to honor someone or give someone “face” is to acknowledge them as being *xinren*. *Xinren* then becomes a metaphor for something greater than just trust. It becomes a symbolic emblem of a person’s depth of character. In this research I pay particular attention to metaphors used by my participants as a way of understanding their internal view or stance when describing their experiences. Some of these metaphors are culturally specific as in this example, while others are more indicative of the way in which my participants understand their role within the Confucius Institute or how they are experiencing and negotiating liminal spaces.

Understanding metaphors used within the subtle variation of language, or ways in which symbols are interpreted by a collective are an important part of being a cultural insider. Steger (2007) argues analyzing metaphors and a participant’s particular use of metaphors in context reveals and reinforces culturally significant values that may not be otherwise understood by outsiders to the group (p. 6). Because I am a cultural insider with my particular set of participants, metaphors can also be a tool to understand the unconscious aspects of my participant’s narrative and be used to provide a forum of expression considered safe or unthreatening (p. 18). The interpretation of metaphors can capture the complexities and nuances traditional research methodologies might not encompass (Dixson, 2005, p. 109) and can help me as a researcher to develop a new level of consciousness and affirmation for what my participants are trying to impart (p. 133).

Metaphors, while they can highlight internal or culturally specific notions, can also seemingly oversimplify complex phenomena, thereby allowing me as the researcher to assume

knowledge or meaning. Metaphors can also be convoluted or distorted versions of meaning, drawing away from rather than toward a deeper understanding of the subject and message. In this way, appropriating metaphors (like co-composing portraiture), must be considered as one necessary aspect of interacting with and understanding dialogue in context to what I bring to this research paradigm.

2.7.5 DIALOGICAL MEANING

Personal narratives also have place within dialogical meaning. With a dialogic process there is an extension of standard ethnographic analysis toward of biographical/life history to underscore that there is a simultaneous writing of lives and selves (Coffey, 1999, p. 150). According to Hermans (2013), within regular spoken conversation, for the researcher there exists a type of listening that attends to the implicit intentions behind the speakers' actual words. Dialogics, unlike dialectic process, is a fluid process that assumes there is no end within what is implied or said. A dialogic exchange can be less competitive, and more suitable for facilitating cooperation, much like the exchange that occurs within social situations, or educational settings (p. 86). This meta-perspective, "provides an overarching view that allows one to consider different positions simultaneously, including their relevant linkages" (p. 86).

The purpose of dialogical exchange is to move beyond the familiar perspective the researcher holds to understand the experiences of others not like herself (p. 82) by analyzing the self, or I-position (p. 83). Although dialogical analysis tends to focus on discourse, Hermans (2013) makes clear that dialogical analysis is unique from discourse analysis and conversation analysis because the concentration of theory extends beyond the concept of how people speak and what they gain by speaking by allowing a natural process of positioning and repositioning to

occur (p. 86). Thus, the dialogical approach to narrative representation exploits conversation as a means to make real social events and interactions among individuals (Coffey, 1999, p. 150).

The various methods by which I can frame data gathered through the personal narratives is both an outcome and a joint project of co-creation my participants. Portraiture is but one method which allows an in-depth consideration of a story to represent larger themes or bodies of knowledge by examining one particular individual's experience framed within the context of something beyond the self.

The advantages of adopting portraiture to this research as a relational process is that this method allows me to understand in a deep and meaningful way the particular internal struggles or concepts held by one person (e.g. Behar, 1997) and to apply these concepts to situations or social contexts that effect populations or groups (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The challenge of portraiture is the underlying assumption that one person's story tells a complete picture or is representational of other conflicting themes. Because portraiture requires a long commitment (sometimes years) of exposure and interaction, portraiture as a research methodology requires a great deal of introspection on the part of the researcher, a stepping back so-to-speak from the data, and an objective understanding of the researchers' own perceptions about her subject, and own attachment and involvement in the data. As a research methodology, portraiture is both limited and enhanced by my decisions on what to include and discard and by the relationship between myself and my participant.

Metaphors are one method of narrative that allow for other culturally constructed aspects of dialogue to be considered within this research. Metaphors act as both a revelation of underlying deeply held beliefs and as a window into the narrative underpinnings of what is being said by the subject. Metaphors can draw a map toward a culturally specific concept of self, and,

be a safe method by which a subject can subconsciously seek affirmation or acceptance (Dixson, 2005; Geertz, 1973; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Steger, 2007). As a method for understanding and interpreting narrative, metaphors serve as a kind of link between what is said by the subject and what is meant by the researcher. But much like portraiture, metaphors have distinct drawbacks in that there is a risk of oversimplification of complex phenomena that may lead the researcher to incorrect or marginal interpretation of what was said.

Adopting aspects of dialogical inquiry, or a method in which the social and psychological aspects of narrative are used to engage, separate, reconsider, or position an individual (both researcher and subject), is complex and nuanced. Dialogical interpretation of narrative is based in positioning and repositioning the dialogue of the subjects and how the researcher is interpreting what is being said within a particular sphere (Coffey, 1999; Hermans, 2013). The advantages of adopting dialogical interpretation for this research for me is the reflexivity of the process which helps me to come to conclusions of my participant's narratives that are both iterative and deductive. The constant back-and-forth with the data and my ability to reconsider the data allows for thick description that might not otherwise be available or considered.

2.8 CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

China's rise in the global economic community has created a situation that is equal parts opportunity and anxiety for scholars, economists, and domestic governmental entities alike. Instead of allowing the rest of the world to come to it, so to speak, in the mid-2000's China set forth an international campaign to assert itself both economically and culturally, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the establishment of Confucius Institutes in more than 80 foreign

countries. Through a specialized division of the Ministry of Education known as Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters, the Chinese government has developed and funded culture and language centers, primarily in cooperation with institutions of higher learning domestically and abroad. The stated goal of the Confucius Institutes by Hanban is to provide a forum by which citizens of all countries can learn Mandarin Chinese and learn about Chinese history and culture. Culture is described by Hanban as language, music, the arts, calligraphy, dance, theater and cultural history. Funding for the Confucius Institutes is provided by Hanban on an annual basis to each center and is provided as a matching grant (after the initial infusion of start-up funds) with resources committed to the centers by each foreign university.

2.8.1 CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN THE U.S.

In the United States there are currently 110 Confucius Institutes (400 globally), up from 20 world-wide in 2007, 35 of which are run by female directors (Hanban North American Program Officer, J. F. Miao, personal email, May 18, 2016). Within the institutes there are cultural negotiations which occur when a Chinese governmental agency and a United States higher education research institution create a program together that in itself highlights the differences between the two nations. Hanban requires that each Confucius Institute be established in conjunction with a college, university, or center of higher learning in China. Thus, there is a triangulation of negotiations between the three entities (Hanban, U.S. institutions, Chinese universities) which immediately creates a complex and multilayered web of potential miscommunication and culturally-specific nuances. Further complicating this mash-up are rules and regulations of U.S. institutes of higher learning (usually highly decentralized bureaucracies)

which can run counter to Chinese governmental rules and regulations (highly centralized bureaucracy).

The goal of the Confucius Institutes has been to create good will between China and the United States, but the work of the Confucius Institutes has not always had favorable response from the U.S. media, from members of Congress, or from local, often more than not, conservative civic organizations. There have been several scholarly articles (Hartig, 2011; Kluver, R. 2014; Wang & Adamson, 2014, to note just a few), and even a Congressional committee (*The Price of Public Diplomacy with China*, Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, March 28, 2012) which have considered the role of the Confucius Institutes as Chinese “soft power” as they have engaged with U.S. universities and colleges, and even some backlash from individual scholars (e.g. Sahlins, 2013). Much of the controversy in the media has been related to concerns regarding the potential interference by the Confucius Institutes (and by affiliation, the Chinese government) in academic freedom and integrity within the U.S. academy, and the optics surrounding the ability of the Chinese government to negatively exert influence regarding their own political interests in human and religious rights, territorial disputes, and other controversies by being affiliated directly with U.S. higher education institutions.

While analyzing the role that these controversies have played in the management of the Confucius Institutes is beyond the scope of this research, I concede these controversies have had direct and indirect impact in the formation of the Six Sisters Consortium. Feelings regarding being caught in the middle between our university needs and missions and the often negative press the Confucius Institutes receive, was certainly one aspect of why the six women in this study sought out and coalesced into a formalized group. What became clear through this

research was that each of the women of this Consortium feels caught between the pressure and impact of these negative optics, and the known good work (such as our internationally sponsored historic program on Jewish refugees who lived in Shanghai during WWII) and good will (exposing children in rural parts of the United States to learning Mandarin) the Institutes can often generate. Learning to negotiate these incoming negative messages and constantly being placed in a defensive posture were certainly a contributing (but not the only) factor which define part of the liminal space for each of these participants and added to the significance each of the participants placed on how they valued the relationship to and guidance from the other members of the Consortium.

As I examine in more detail through the participant's narratives and in my conclusion, the various Confucius Institute's development and establishment are complex and culturally specific to the way China and the United States organize and understand process. U.S. directors of Confucius Institutes, particularly those established within universities, are employed by the universities in which they work. In other words, the U.S. directors work for their home universities and are there to oversee the guiding of the Institutes on behalf of their universities. Hanban, the Chinese-side funding agency, usually sends a Chinese representative to the foreign university to act as a co-director (also known as *zhongfang yuanzhang*; more below regarding this arrangement) yet the influence and ability of the Chinese directors to manage inside the U.S. Institutes varies from school to school. For the most part, the Chinese directors from China have very limited, if any, ability to influence or manage the Institute's in the United States because they are not employees of the U. S. universities. The Chinese directors, despite having the titles of "co-director" often cannot function with any real authority because they are usually considered to be "visiting" and thus not permanent scholars or administrators within the

university management system. This marginalized position for the Chinese directors is often a source of contention and disconnect between them and the U.S. host school, and is yet another layer of the complex negotiating paradigm within which each U.S. Confucius Institute director must contend.

Confucius Institutes were initially established (in 2004) with very little guidance, guidelines, or principles for organization from Hanban and it was thus up to the U.S. (and other global) directors to come up with a vision for their programs that would fit with the mission or interests of their home universities. Because of the ambiguous role of the Chinese director in general, most Institutes (at least those of the Six Sisters) give the Chinese director a very limited set of duties, most of which fall outside of the parameters of consequential decision making. For example, the Chinese director at our university primarily oversees the management of the intern volunteers and any paperwork related to the reporting of statistics (which we generate) regarding number of classes, etc. In other words, her role is guided by my direction and limited accordingly. All decisions on curriculum, pedagogy, teaching materials, outcomes, and practice are determined by me and our permanent staff, and guided strictly by the American Council for Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL) standards. This arrangement is not unlike how the other Sister directors organize and work with their Chinese directors.

2.8.2 THE SIX SISTERS CONSORTIUM

The Confucius Institute in which I work was established in 2007, and the initial ambiguity in structural process is what led me to seek advice from other directors during various meetings in China and the U.S. In the beginning, a lack of organizational guidelines (a good and bad thing in

our minds) meant we had to talk to each other in order to try and sort out the purpose of the Institutes and how to give organizational structure to a relatively unstructured program.

These informal meetings lead to a core group of women (all of whom are part of or affiliated with Research 1 universities in the U.S.) to meeting on a regular basis and sharing common principles regarding how to best negotiate the challenges and ambiguity of our situations. According to Sims and Stephens (2005) we became a *self-identified* group, in that we came together on our own accord via shared values and a belief in certain lore regarding the organization to which we belonged (p. 41-42). Confucius Institute processes are loosely organized philosophically by Hanban around culturally specific Chinese elements of respect for hierarchy (e.g. Hanban prefers presidents of universities to be the heads of Confucius Institute internal board of advisors), of a notion of internal competition for recognition amongst the global Institutes (by conferring Confucius Institute of the Year and Director of the Year awards at the annual Confucius Institute Congress each December), and of a lack of overt transparency on given regulations and procedures. There is always a kind of opaque sense of the “right path” to take in any given situation that requires a great deal of knowledge about Chinese culture and governmental processes, all of which is part of the on-the-job training for all directors. Most U. S. Confucius Institute directors have extensive knowledge of and experience with China and Chinese culture, as do I and the other women with whom I sought guidance and support. Yet, these opaque processes become a central tenant of our own sense of liminality, as we constantly work and negotiate within a space (cultural, structural, symbolic) between our universities and the constructs of Hanban.

Early on in my engagement with the other female directors I realized a more formalized structure to work on group projects could mutually benefit all of us and give us a collective voice

with which to address Hanban's particular concerns. The women who came together to form this consortium were all "award" winners by Hanban; we had all won either Confucius Institute of the Year or Director of the Year, some of us multiple times. These designations are significant in that the forming of the consortium under the circumstances of being award winners meant we were among the top individuals who Hanban saw as competent, excellent, and trustworthy (the significance of which I will look at more closely below). That we came together was received as somewhat of a surprise by our Chinese colleagues in that this kind of cooperation was viewed as "foreign" because the Hanban structural system for Confucius Institutes is organized in a manner that perpetuates individuation of centers and competition for recognition.

The first order of business of the newly formed consortium was to consider a project which fit both the academic rigor of our universities and the overall guiding principles of Hanban's core (fundable) interests and we settled on a project already under development by one of the members of our group (from Pacific West Coast University). The group then officially set forth a funding agenda in January 2011 through our annual budgets to Hanban in which a written proposal to the project was highlighted as a key program in each of our budgets. The project had a local-global focus, meaning it was broad enough to have nationwide appeal, but could be targeted specifically toward the interests of our local communities. By March I received an email from our North American program officer in China who referred to us as the "Six Sisters" (*liu jiemei*) and our project as the "Six Sisters Project." This conferring of a name upon our group was proof of recognition of our consortium by our primary funding agent and legitimized the consortium which then allowed us each to access funding for nationally-oriented projects together.

2.8.3 WAIFANG YUANZHANG: THE OUTSIDE DIRECTORS

The Confucius Institute women deal with liminality in many different ways. For example, Western/non-China based directors, are always referred to as the *waifang yuanzhang* (literally, the *outside* directors) by members of Hanban, by the China-based Confucius Institute headquarters staff, and by the visiting Chinese directors from China. The Chinese directors from China are referred to by Hanban and other Chinese colleagues in China as the *neifang yuanzhang* (*inside*, or native Chinese directors) setting up a dialogic split that immediately sets the stage for potential resentments, or the very least a semantic divide. Even our colleague in this study who is of Chinese decent is considered by Hanban to be a *waifang yuanzhang*, even as her heritage creates confusion for both her and the Chinese administrators of Hanban, as I found out through her interview. Being called *outsiders* by the group in China with whom you are to negotiate partnerships sets the stage for dilemmas between the U.S. and Chinese authorities. Because U.S. women directors of Confucius Institutes are a minority with fewer than 1/4th being female to begin with, being both female in a male dominated organization, and considered an *outsider* becomes a symbolic if not real burden for many female foreign directors.

From this research and the interviews with my participants, I have come to understand that these differences in culturally specific approaches, values, and norms create tensions which dovetail directly with the overall ambiguity of being a Confucius Institute director for the women of the Six Sisters Consortium. The relationships that each of these women developed to each other as colleagues, friends, confidants, and trusted peers was a key component of how they managed these liminal spaces and self-identified their own ambivalence. Yet, through this research I also came to understand that the Confucius Institute program is but one aspect of how these women negotiate in liminal spaces in their professional and personal lives.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the dilemmas and challenges of being a female Confucius Institute director specifically, and of being a female in a multi-stakeholder organization more generally, it is important for me to ground my participant's experiences within theories of feminist praxis and literature, and to clearly define and frame what I mean by liminality, trust, voice, and the importance of hearing and understanding women's experiences as it pertains to this research.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

One aspect of this the research is to consider how feminist theories intersect with the study of women and women's friendships development in the workplace. To narrow the scope of the inquiry I am centering the core consideration of these intersections by framing the narrative interpretation on two primary themes of liminality and trust. This literature review highlights trends in feminist praxis and helps me to foreground how liminality and trust as themes in this research are considered and applied.

3.2 FEMINISM

In *The Ethnographic Self*, Coffey (1999) argues, feminist research praxis is not about particular methods or techniques, but rather about the methodological “framing, outcomes, and reflection on research and the research process” (p. 12). As Coffey elaborates, there is a kind of feminist pluralism in research that can emerge which does not assign itself to one end or the other of the feminist perspective nor does it dichotomize the process (p. 12). Rather, a feminist perspective is grounded in feminist discourse to locate “the self as gendered, embodied, sexualized and emotional being, in and of the research; discounting the myth that social research can ever be neutral or hygienic” (p. 12). For my own purposes as a researcher, grounding my research within an understanding of women’s experiences in peer-to-peer relationships means I recognize my own voice and attachment to the process and acknowledge this through my own reflexive progression with the data I gathered.

3.2.1 TRENDS IN FEMINIST RESEARCH

What constitutes a “feminist perspective” is a contested view within social science research and is subject to trends and cultural influences. Feminist theories acknowledge the intersectionality of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and, within the focus of my study, cultural and ethnic-isms. Since these influences intersect in lived experiences, feminist theories also bring to the forefront the varying degrees to which oppression is layered within structures of power (Villaverde, 2008, p. 55).

In her book, *Bad Feminism*, Gay (2014) opens her collection of essays regarding modern feminism with this quote: “I worried that feminism wouldn’t allow me to be the mess of a

woman I knew myself to be” (p. xi). In this statement, Gay acknowledges one of the dilemmas in feminist theory: the conflicting and sometimes overlapping principles of feminism that create a kind of theoretical ambiguity. Essentializing feminism within a belief that there is one true set of guiding principles negates and narrows the way in which feminist principles of equity, equality, tolerance, agency, and accountability have shaped and informed modern society. Feminism, much like positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory, is often referred to in the singular, despite the pluralism which must be addressed in each of these constructs (Crotty, 1998, p. 160).

My use of narrative inquiry in this research design is important in that I am not seeking objectivity from my interviewees, but rather seeking a framework to allow me to constantly reconsider my own predispositions regarding feminism and other theories. Acknowledging that women work within constructs of liminality further allows me to reconsider feminist principles as ever changing and fluid according to the experiences of those in this study and to reimagine my participants experience within a “feminine” as well as “feminist” epistemology (Crotty, 1998, p.174) which could aid in avoiding essentialization of my participant’s experiences.

Feminism, according to Villaverde (2008), as a theoretical construct is a collective/social movement which highlights the privilege and inequality of gender (p. 1). But feminism also comes in many forms and has many schools of thought which sometime stand in opposition to one another. In Villaverde’s (2008) book, *Feminist Theories and Education*, there is an intersectionality of issues based in lived experience which complicate and stratify feminist theory (p. 6). In addition to liberal feminism (finding opportunity within the system without changing the system), radical feminism (changing the system to create a more equitable stance for women), and socialist feminism (interdependent class and gender oppression) (p. 6-7), are those

that see feminism in terms of sexual differences (Beasley, 1999). There is Black feminist thought and Womanist feminism, Latina/Chicana feminism, Native American/Indigenous and Asian American feminism, and feminist Queer theory. Within these theories are the concepts of agency, subjectivity, and positionality which are often associated with the construct of power.

Allen (2014) frames feminism in terms of power structures: power-*over* (getting someone else to do) vs power-*to* (an ability or capacity to act) (p. 2). Marxist theories of economic and sociopolitical inquiry, which emphasize the development of capitalism and the role of class struggle within that development, are often used in concert with feminist theory to describe the lack of power women traditionally had in society due to the lack of valuation of their labor both paid and unpaid (p.4). Radical feminists see power as something that is a resource, possessed in greater or lesser amounts, and believe the distribution has been unequal (lesser) for women (p. 4). Thus power, or in the Marxist view, those who control the means of production and exploit the surplus value produced by workers, impacts the social, political, and philosophical constructs of feminism. *Marxism*, however, much like the term *feminism*, has been convoluted and reassigned to involve several antecedents and schools of thought, many of which are not necessarily “pure” Marxist theory or Marxian analysis.

The devaluation of women’s work, particularly in the realm of unpaid labor associated with domestic duties contributes to persistent stereotypes about the role and value of women in society. This aspect of devaluation holds meaning to this study as well in that my participants each mention the duties and competing roles in their lives (as professionals, mothers, sisters, wives) as being another component of negotiating in the liminal space and contributes to their feeling of ambiguity and the impact of these gendered roles.

3.2.2 THE FEMINIST DILEMMA

The dilemma of using a “feminist” perspective to define or highlight notions of gender roles lies in the very nature of these conflicting and divergent points of view. For me, to be a scholar engaged in feminist research is to accept and acknowledge the imperfect nature of my own certitude with regard to what I learn. Villaverde (2008) notes in order to be a scholar comfortable with the ambiguity between research decision and action a researcher must assume the role of the *trickster*, or “antagonist agent of uncertainty” (p. 105). The trickster is one who is able to “stand in the spaces of reality, negotiation, intention, desire and the unknown” to act comfortably enough with research decisions (p. 105) and to require a certain degree of reconceptualization based on reinterpretation of “experience, history and events” (p. 11).

Feminist research continues to have tensions between the personal and the political, and to take into consideration diverse epistemologies that must acknowledge a range of responses (Avishai, Gerber, & Randles, 2013, p 42). Given the conflicting and opposing stances of feminist constructs, it is critical for the researcher to clearly situate her position for the sake of clarity, objectivity, intentionality, and subjectivity of the research design. The framework of Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, (1996) defines a feminist perspective as one in which women’s thought patterns are contextual and more embedded in relational concerns than those of men (Goldberger et al., p. 1996, p. 151) and in which women consider “truths” as they pertain to women and men as being limited. As Goldberger et al. (1996) notes, there are inherent limitations “in basing theoretical distinctions exclusively on gender” (p. 151).

Coffey (1999), however, sees feminist research praxis as not grounded in a particular method or technique so much as it is about methodological framing process which allows issues around the positionality of self to be “situated within social and cultural contexts; how the self

gets defined and redefined through mediation of culture and language; and how voices and lives are captured and represented” (p. 13). In this way, feminist research praxis intersects directly with narrative methodology in that both can be used to frame and understand cultural and social contexts within individuals’ lived experiences.

As noted above, I agree with Coffey’s (1999) assessment of feminist research methodology that it is grounded in the discourse to want to locate the self as a “gendered, embodied, sexualized and emotional being” (p. 12). In a sense, feminist research praxis then is not based so much in a distinct method or technique, but is grounded “in the methodological framing, outcomes and reflections of the research and the research process” (p.12). Because this research includes life histories, interviews, and fieldwork with women in a field in which I have intimate knowledge, acknowledging and reconsidering my position as a feminist, and a scholar is an essential element of my research paradigm.

In this dissertation I assume a post-modern interpretive constructivist paradigm as described by Villaverde (2008, p. 107) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) who emphasize the importance of the researchers’ expression of her own subjectivity and agency. Much as I assume in this research, this paradigm assumes an epistemology which values construction, experience, and discussion of the research between subject and researcher and emphasizes the importance of reflexivity to the research process (p. 107).

An interpretive constructivist paradigm is one in which, “the core of understanding is learning what people make of the world around them, how people interpret what they encounter, and how they assign meanings and values to events or objects” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). This research is with women with whom I have shared a multiple of circumstances and events situated in a global context (both in and outside the United States, and with foreign governmental

agencies). Being thoughtful and aware of the boundaries between my experiences and theirs, our relationships as colleagues and friends, and our collective and individual identities, has been an ongoing part of my own reflexive process and a way to continually reevaluate my own positionality within the research and within the relationship with my group.

Field notes that I collected during and after interviews are an important part of this study. For example, when considering the interview transcripts from my first two participants I wrote, “there seems to be a tension between the truth, revealing your true feelings, and weighing the long-term consequences of revealing.” (unpublished field note, June 20, 2017). This position reveals the way I began to interact with the narratives as I considered the notion of tensions as part of the liminal state, and recognizing the limitations of my participants to watch what they say in case there were consequences later down the road. I took this notion of perceived tension and applied it as I conducted other interviews to see if this happened to be about these early set of participants, or if this were something that I needed to pay attention to for everyone involved in the study.

3.3 LIMINALITY

The initial concept of liminality developed by Arnold van Gennep (1960) was in the consecration of ritual and ritualization of the rites of passage and within the context of specific cultural ritual which marked the life stages of various cultural groups. The ethnographic meaning of liminality is based on the initial writings of van Gennep and his study of the significance of ritual in rites of passage for individuals in various stages of life (birth, marriage, or death, etc.) through his publication *Les Rites de Passage* (1909). Van Gennep’s original thesis was that humans went

through transitional phases in life in three successive stages: separation, margin, and aggregation (Turner, 1964 p. 46). It is within this middle stage, margin, in which Turner (1964) concentrated his examination to consider how the margin phase of a rite of passage created a condition of “sacred poverty” whereby the individual in this liminal stage has “no status, property, rank or kinship” by removing the individual from society so that the individual is essentially invisible (p. 46). The initial concept of liminality was in the consecration of ritual and ritualization of the rites of passage and within the context of specific cultural ritual which marked the life stages of various cultural groups. To be in this marginalized or liminal space was to be “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1964, p. 46) and within that phase was the place of transformation to the next place within society through aggregation or acceptance. Change, according to Turner signifies a transformation as the person moves from one stage of life to the next (Boland, 2013, p. 229).

Recently, Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra (2015) expanded the term to include the spatial (borders, zones, disputed lands) and temporal (temporary state of being, decades, generations) (p. 40). The state of liminality under this designation can include entire societies or groups, such as when a cataclysmic event (tsunami, political upheaval) creates a monumental shift in the social structure (p. 40). Within this consideration displaced people, illegal immigrants, or those fleeing from conflict are liminal in that they are neither of the place they reside nor of the home they left.

As much as Horvath et al (2015) and Turner (1964) have designated liminality to be a space for movement and transformation or something to escape or transcend, I believe it also a space where women learn to negotiate balance in their lives, a struggle with conflicting messages about who they are as leaderships, or simply within the lived experience of what it means to maneuver in-between. This concept of “permanent liminality” is more aligned to Szakolczai

(2000) where “liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases of this sequence (of separation, liminality, and reaggregation) become frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame” (p. 220). In the historic sense many communities have had features of permanent liminality including monasticism or court societies (Szakolczai, 2000, p. 220) but in the modern sense Giesen (2009) argues, “modernity is a continuous transgression of boundaries and breaking down of traditions, and therefore involves a deep-rooted sense of ambivalence” (as cited in Horvath et al, 2015, p. 55).

While the central notion of liminality has been to acknowledge a process of change and transformation, I use the term liminality in this thesis as a place or stage unto itself, particularly for women. As much as Horvath (2015) et al. and Turner (1964) have determined liminality as a space for movement and transformation, I believe for the women of this study, it is a space where women learn to negotiate the balance in their lives, a struggle with conflicting messages, or simply within the lived experience of what it means to maneuver in-between.

Mäklsoo (2015) explains this by stating, “the idea of “perpetual liminality” emerges as a condition characteristic of societies that have long lived “on the limit” and thus proven quite unable to conclusively surpass the experience, in spite of the apparent entrance into the phase of societal reaggregation (p. 232). For women directors of the Confucius Institutes, the liminal state plays out for them in the constant negotiation between university and Chinese governmental agencies, in being female in a male-dominated field, and in the cultural process between U.S. and Chinese societal norms which serve to create and reinforce a position of permanent liminality. Boland (2013) argues that modernity creates a kind of suspension of structure where “liminality entails an experience of formlessness, and in permanent liminality, this anti-structural experience is taken as the paramount reality” (p. 234).

Liminality in its original form as place within ritual has come to symbolize space, a place, a time, or a transition but I believe can also be, in a metaphorical sense, a symbolic encounter, transformation, or grappling with the status quo.

3.4 TRUST

This interpretation considers trust and the way in which the women of my study develop and understand trust as a key factor in their ability to learn from others within the consortium. When I use the word trust in this thesis I mean interpersonal (dyadic) trust (Simpson, 2007) in both a theoretical and empirical sense, or trust as it manifests itself within cultural significance considerations, both in the United States and in China. I also consider our roles as directors of Confucius Institutes as a basis from which to examine the concept of trust and trusting relationships with one another and with our colleagues not in the consortium.

According to Simpson (2007), “trust is a psychological state or orientation of an actor (the truster) toward a specific partner (the trustee) with whom the actor is in some way interdependent” (p. 264). While trust can be difficult to study, some scholars believe (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley et al., 2003; Simpson, 2007) that there are certain aspects of trust which exist within relationships that determine the importance and level of self-interests by the individuals and the ability for those in trusting relationships to assume these needs are being met by the individual(s) in the partnerships or relationships (Simpson, 2007, p. 265). Simpson outlines four core principals of interpersonal trust as: individuals assume gauges which determine if the partners are making decisions that go against self-interests for the sake of the greater good (trust-diagnostic situations); individuals may create trust-diagnostic situations to

determine if the other individuals or members of the group are trustworthy; differences in how individuals attachment orientation, self-esteem, or self-differentiation often affects the success or failure of the relationship over time; and lastly, the trust-diagnostic situation is not fully understood except through actions and position of the partnership over time (p. 265).

This inquiry requires me to consider trust in both a domestic U.S., and Chinese context as well as the value others place on trust within the consortium. Trust in Chinese society is centralized on core relationships, leveraging those relationships (*guanxi*), and the notion of relying on that trust in various ways. The degree to which the Chinese concept of trust interplays within the Confucius Institutes, trust within our group, trust with those not in our consortium, and with our colleagues in China all come into play, I argue, in terms of how we develop and consider our evolving roles to one another and to the stake holders with whom we engage. In this interpretation, I consider how relationship development through trust is situated within critical feminist literature, and use this to understand the dialogue regarding the significance my participants place on these relationships.

3.5 WOMEN AND FRIENDSHIPS

More than 40 years ago psychologists and sociologists, primarily male, created theories of human development based on the study of middle-class white boys and men. As has been pointed out by Greene (2003), conventional psychology has “failed to provide an adequate theoretical base for describing changes in the psychology of girls and women across the life span” (p. 1).

Surprisingly, the literature on women and friendship development outside of adolescence is somewhat sparse and falls primarily within the realm of social-psychology/counseling (Hatch & Forgays, 2001; O'Neal & Egan, 1993), or sociology/anthropology (Hey, 1997) literature. There is more research on adolescent girls, on gender identity, and on the development of adolescent girls' moral judgment (Hatch & Forgays, 2001; Hey, 1997; Greene, 2003; Pipher, 2002) than on the importance of the long-term impact of sororal friendship development. The most salient research is by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), and Goldberger et al. (1996) who explore in-depth women's relationships to other women and the significance of these to the development of identity, and who examine the way in which women situate themselves into the cultural and societal dialogue between themselves and other women. However, this significant research is somewhat dated, some of which was written almost 30 years ago and framed within the dialogue of the second wave of feminism where an emphasis on gender parity was still being developed. This gap in the literature between then and the now emerging third wave of feminism is something which needs closer examination.

For the women of my group, friendship is an ongoing theme which each person mentioned in her interview. To have this set of friends, and to be able to trust these women was central to the way in which all these women organized and thought about their place within the Confucius Institute networks. Friendships were a surprising and grateful take-away for most of the participants, and not a small factor in the overall "glue" that kept many from continuing to participate.

3.5.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Over the decades, as more women entered the field of social psychology, and as the second and third waves of feminism took hold, social psychologists developed theories involving girls and women in more depth. At the forefront of feminist dialogue was the concept of adolescent girls and the way in which adolescence was a critical juncture in the development and solidification of young women's identity and notions of self (Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Goldberger et al., 1996; Pipher, 2002). While the male dominated view of adolescence had previously focused on individuation and autonomy, new bodies of work suggested that adolescent girls and women, in contrast, focus on maintaining relationships with others and with themselves (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). In their book on wage disparity, *Women Don't Ask*, Babcock and Laschever (2003), note that in experiments by Clancy and Dollinger (1993) where college women and men were asked to submit photos of "themselves as they saw themselves," 69% of women versus 38% of men submitted photos of themselves with others, whereby men submitted photos of themselves with prized possessions (e.g. cars), in action, or alone (Babcock and Laschever, 2003, p. 117). Networks, or how women relate to other women and see themselves in consortium with and to others, I argue, is an essential part of women's self-identity and how they position themselves within organizations and relationships.

As part of this interdependence, Babcock and Laschever (2003) further outline the concept of interdependent "self-schemas" as outlined by Cross and Madson (1997). Psychologists speculate that the differences in the way in which men and women place emphasis on relationships contributes to construals of self (Babcock and Laschever, 2003, p. 118). These self-schemas are the interior self-portrait which allow men and women to see themselves in relation to themselves and others, and, as Babcock and Laschever argue, are the primary

motivator to an individual's behavior. Women, according to Cross and Madson (1997) have more highly developed interdependent self-schemas, and, not only define themselves in terms of their connections to others, but "relationships are viewed as integral parts of the person's very being" (p. 7). The concept of self in relation to others and how that self is defined and cultivated (through voice, trust-building) is a key component of this research and, I argue, is central to how women define themselves as in relation to other women.

Grogan and Shakeshift (2011) offer another key element of female relationships arguing, "women's conceptions of power are closely tied to the importance they place on relationships," and that "power through relationships is more likely to be how women confront change" (p. 7). As mentioned above regarding power "over" vs power "to", Grogan and Shakeshift (2011) believe that women often describe power as increasing the more it is shared (p. 7). In Grogan and Shakeshift's model, women see power as something that is not "power over" within a group but rather "power with" (p.7) and identify this work as particularly relevant when looking at the relationships between female educational administrators.

3.5.2 VOICE AND FRIENDSHIPS

As Martínez Alemán (2010) has pointed out, "a feminist examination of the educative developmental value of women's female friendships should reflect gender in time and place, as a social property, and as vital to the construction of self" (p. 556). Martínez Alemán observes through her longitudinal study of female friendships in college, that there is a "developmental impact of friendship and conversation (or "talk") on women especially as it pertains to cognitive growth and authorship" (p. 557). Dialogue and interaction is central to this discussion because it is a "manifestation of the feminine predisposition toward connection and conversation"

(Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 18) that acts as the foundation to women's source of power when in a leadership role.

Women's voices, how they speak, what their messages say, and how they relate to others through words is part of the leadership paradigm for women and a source of both their power and their credibility (Gilligan 1997; Belenky, et al., 1997). It is a central method women use to build trust with one another, and a way in which they work toward solidifying their goals as a means to achieve together that which could not be otherwise achieved individually. According to Belenky, et al. (1997), "Voice" [is] more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view. We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined. ... Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction" (p. 18). I would argue further that voice and the way in which women communicate also helps to solidify their commitment to one another and allows them to form and reify their own identity.

3.5.3 TRUST IN FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Another reason peer-level adult female friendship or sororal relationships are of significant importance to women is that often times women lack mentors or other women higher up in the social/business strata who can help them develop professionally. A study by Ely and Rhode (2010) points out that a lack of mentors in the field create major barriers to advancement for women (p.5). In addition, certain cultural ambivalence about navigating differences in societal and organizational terrain emerge when women enter into traditionally male roles (p. 3). According to Ely and Rhode (2010), biases play out on several levels which impact women's

ability to lead regardless of how many “gender” sensitive or organizational committees are formed to eliminate barriers to success (p. 3). Other reasons including the organizational structure of leadership paths and positions, the way in which people perceive women leaders (often as being less competent; or competent but then less likeable), and the way women themselves see themselves and what they consider they need to do to succeed also have impact (Hogue and Lord, 2007).

Trust, much like voice, becomes a central tenant to the way in which women organize and develop personal skills because they act as the foundation to relationships. According to Babcock and Laschever (2003), “extensive literature in virtually every discipline in the social and behavioral sciences concludes that relationships play a more central role in the lives of women than in the lives of men” regardless of age (p. 116). For women, this relationship-based orientation plays out in different ways when it comes to negotiations and engagement with others. Men, according to Babcock and Laschever, tend to see negotiations as pertaining to defending their position where women often look at negotiations as a way to find an interest-based resolution (p. 116). Because women may often have different considerations when entering negotiations, trust and voice are often important components to the way in which women reframe the interaction with others away from adversarial or conflict-oriented negotiations and more toward positions of problem solving. The relationship-based lens from which women interact means women often do not separate issues being worked out in a business deal from the relationship of the people with which they are negotiating (p. 116). These differences in perceived methods to outcomes (maintenance of an individual’s goal verses maintenance of the relationship) often creates a situation where women’s leadership style may not be valued or understood relative to more transactional leadership dynamics.

In terms of the Six Sisters of the Confucius Institutes, directors trust of one another was a key factor in the formation of the group. Yet the level and depth of friendships developed through the group were a surprise to most of the members in that many felt they were in other kinds of consortium that did not result in deeper personal relationships. In the conclusion I examine more closely the particular aspects of trust, the liminal state, and the friendships of this group as being a result of shared common goals, and the dynamic of these women's particular approach to working with each other.

3.5.4 THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE

Much as Gilligan (1997) and Belenky (et al., 1997) have mentioned in their research, trust and solidifying goals as a collective is often a source of power for women. For the women of this consortium their narratives reflect the power many of them felt as part of the collective and that the collective voice gave them more leveraging influence both at home within their universities and with the Chinese government. Feminist scholars (Allen, 2014; Miller, 1992) have noted similar ways in which women use the power of the collective as a means to push an agenda. In the conclusion I will look more closely at the power of the collective and what it meant for the participants of this study.

The recent global Women's March of January 2017 (<https://www.womensmarch.com/>) and the subsequent collective political and social movements, is but one example of how the formation of a large and vocal group has the ability to inspire both social change and awareness. I see the publishing of the stories of participants of the Women's March, *Together We Rise* (2018), as a form of feminist praxis that recognizes the power of narrative as a means of embody change. In this way, the Women's March and this research intersect in that recognizing the

voices and stories women tell regarding their experiences (either on the micro or macro level) has the ability to highlight inequalities in systems and the need to address those inequalities.

My own experience leading a Confucius Institute and my relationship with these five other Confucius Institute directors, certainly made me understand that the collective and individual notions of power came to light through these personal narratives regarding each woman's successes and dilemmas. While this research focuses on the narratives of the women of the Six Sisters Consortium of the Confucius Institute, and the way in which each negotiates the ambiguities, cultural and philosophical dissidence, and struggles in their personal and professional lives, this research also seeks to highlight the intersection between their narratives and example of methods women employ to maintain or exert influence. What these narratives told me was that for the women of this study, this influence manifests itself within multi-stakeholder organizations in which they work, within the negotiation between their personal and professional lives, and within their internal dialogues between self and the greater world. By highlighting literature on feminist perspectives and paradigms, particularly focused on friendship development and trust, I use this study to consider the impact these kinds of relationships hold for these women to understand the broader implications that others might experience when negotiating the liminal spaces of their own lives.

The following set of interviews are structured to allow the voice of my participants to become the central focus of this research inquiry. In the next few chapters I introduce Sun, Celia, Laura, Jane, and Talley by highlighting their narratives as a means to understand how they negotiate the liminal space in their lives. My interview questions focused on dealing with the in-between, trust, friendships, and the value they place on the consortium as a means to frame the dialogue for themselves and for this study.

4.0 SUN

Several years ago, I was attending our annual China-based Hanban December global congress in Shanghai and about to have breakfast. This yearly meeting for the directors is both inconvenient and useful. Inconvenient in that December is such a busy time in academia (and our personal lives) and useful in that it gives us several days to see other directors from all over the world and work through various issues we are having in formal and informal ways.

This morning, I was in no real hurry, having been up since 4:00 a.m. I was settling into my breakfast with several hundred other delegates when I saw my colleague Sun in the breakfast line. We took a seat near one of the large picture windows that looked out over a Chinese-style garden. Our mash-up breakfast of Chinese dim-sum, scrambled eggs, and tea gave us evidence that even though we might be jet-lagged and mildly confused, there was no doubt as to where we were.

I remember that day sitting with Sun because of something she said at breakfast that became one of the tenets to this dissertation research. That being, as each person brings her experience into focus, each person has her own stance and considerations that are not necessarily the same as everyone else's experience. The breakfast emphasized to me that while we share commonalities, our differences also connect us.

In typical fashion we began that morning by catching up on each other's lives, both professional and personal: How are the kids? What's happening in our personal lives? What is

the latest that is happening with Hanban regulations? I mentioned to Sun that I was beginning to think through aspects of my dissertation and that what I wanted to write about was the Six Sisters. She quickly encouraged me and said she thought it could be a very interesting study. But what aspect was I going to concentrate on? When I said the relationship we had to one another, and to Hanban, Sun laughed. She said, “Let me tell you. You can write about that but you need to keep one thing in mind. For me, with this Chinese face and for you, the relationship you have to Hanban and to all these people here, well, that relationship is so different from what I experience. My Chinese face creates a set of issues that you never have.”

This conversation with Sun then preceded to go on for about an hour. When I wrote about this conversation in a reflective note, I said, “I must think about how the experience for Sun is different than for the other Sisters. But in what way? Do I want to make race a piece of this examination? But if I don’t, how do I address her experience?” (Field note, December 8, 2013)

As I pondered this over the last couple of years I decided that I would let the research interview with Sun lead how I would address her thoughts. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, “narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution” (p. 124).

4.1 SUN’S POSITION

Sun invited me to visit the Southern University campus in late spring of 2017. She was delighted to show me her brand-new center for which they had just finished renovations. The new center was impressive with a striking red façade and state-of-the-art classrooms and offices. Sun’s

work in building this center from the ground up was a big achievement and she was delighted to be able to share with me all that they had been able to accomplish over the last several years. As I got the tour of the new building I was struck by Sun's enthusiasm, warmth, and pride in this accomplishment. I knew from experience that establishing physical space is always a struggle on research university campuses.

We settled into our interview spot of the third floor of the university library. By then it was late afternoon and the warm southern light was streaming into the modern conference room. Sun settled in and began the story of how she began the center and what it meant to be where she was now after years of hard work.

So, the first time I ever thought about doing anything to do with the CI was honestly about helping my husband's career. We were in Beijing in 2006-7, I took a leave of absence from my job in [the northeast U.S.] at that time and went to Beijing with him since he had a Fulbright research. So, when he was there in 2006 a friend sent us a newspaper clip which actually was the Boston Globe which reported that U Mass Boston has a new CI. And then at that time we already knew that my husband was going to come to Southern U. So my husband joined Southern University in the fall of 2007 and I joined Southern University as a lecturer (in 2008). When I arrived the provost in the new faculty orientation he shook my hand and he said, "I want a Confucius Institute."

Sun went on to explain that she was not one of the initial drafters of the Confucius Institute contract but was called upon to give her opinion and advice as the university's Asian Center moved to draft the agreements. When the agreement was signed and the Confucius

Institute was to be developed in 2010, Sun then applied to be the director. The beginning was what I have come to understand as typical for those working on the Confucius Institutes: the start-up had little guidance from Hanban so each director took the lead envisioning what their own center would become. As Sun explains:

I am so tired thinking about how we got started. How did we get all this done? When I first got the job. I thought I knew what I was doing. I started in Beijing, right, I saw those offices. I thought I knew what I was doing. But then when I really got the job I was just you know preparing for the inaugural ceremony, I didn't really think about what kind of director would I be, or what kind of CI was this going to be? So until all the dust from all of this ceremony settled I began to really think hard what kind of CI would we be. In other words, positioning, how were we going to position ourselves and what kind of institute were we going to be? I did some research and at that time, and I didn't know you guys.

When the Institutes came into being the Chinese government had the concept that the Confucius Institutes would be structured much like other language and culture institutes (Alliance Française, Goethe Institut, etc.). However, the actual guidelines for how to create the centers was open to the interpretation of each director. This ambiguity was a great source of consternation for many Confucius Institute directors, and added to a level of confusion for many U.S.- based university administrators. The positive aspect of working in this liminal space was that each director had a great deal of latitude to create a center that would work best for their university. Yet, this space between expectations of China and the U.S. higher education system

also meant directors often had to determine best practices for themselves in an ad hoc manner. As Sun explains further:

But I still couldn't decide on how to position ourselves. I looked at the contract very carefully, and looked at the Hanban website very carefully. I really didn't know what we were going to do. But then I came across Southern University's strategic plan at that time. Everyone was talking about 2020. What it was that by the year 2020 Southern University wants to become the top 20 public university. In the strategic plan, that was their vision. And that one word that kept floating out and that was *internationalization*. I found that really we (Southern U) had very limited number of partnerships with China. And so for me it was like bing! A light bulb coming on and I thought, you know, this CI is a partnership based in China, really truly in that time, in 2010, in internationalization, China is a big part, to get China on the internationalization map is a good thing.

4.2 THE DILEMMA: WHAT MAKES ME CHINESE?

For Sun starting the Institute was a kind of mental gymnastics but running the institute became an even more challenging form of cultural and personal ju-jitsu. As the interview continued it became very apparent that the liminal space for Sun was as much tied to a lack of structure from Hanban as it was intertwined into her own notion of personal identity and her ideas about what makes her Chinese. While other Sister directors struggled with the China-U.S. dilemma as cultural observers and advocate/agitators, Sun's experience came from one of internal and external loyalties and perceptions. Sun's own idea of what it means to be Chinese, and being an

American citizen brought her into the struggle in the liminal space from a perspective different from how the other Sisters encounter and negotiate China and America.

I think when it comes to this job, I think you know, that space that you identified is so crucial for doing a good job. It is because it is a space you use which is bridging. The positive aspect of that is that I feel rewarded if that space is played well and it has produced results such as the Center. And that is the positive place for me. But I also at the same time feel constantly torn. I feel I am in this middle space and my two arms, this side is pulled by Southern U on one side, and that side is pulled by the Chinese side. In almost every major project I negotiated, I felt this pulling, like almost I am torn apart. And that's one part I think it's, it's very challenging and its very tough being the director and being a successful director it is tough to be in that position. I think to be in that position I think what kind of how, what kind of measures do I use? I feel like in between and from both sides I am like a broker and agitator, and holding hands, kind of role, and constantly have to explain or interpret not in the language case, but in the culture. Like for the American side, like when it comes to contracts, right? I understand now you know legal and administration they want certain things and certain things they want it to be done, black and white. But then in the Chinese culture they put things down in general terms to allow interpretation. But the western culture does not allow that interpretation. And they wanted to ask, for example the budget. Like sometimes they wanted an email from Hanban to say that this was ok. And without the email we interpreted, but if you really want them to write it down, no one (in China) wants to do that. So, it is that gray

part of the culture that is really hard to...you know in one culture it is ok and in the other culture it is not ok.

And nothing can be done about it. It becomes a deadlock and it is the ability of how you change that gray into a darker black and white, so that this side of the culture there is this distinction. And there is one part that I want to mention, Michele. For women, foreign directors, *waifang yuanzhang* (outside director), like me, for someone like me, who is an American citizen with a Chinese face, it's even harder.

I ask Sun to elaborate more on this and mention that the conversation we had had in Beijing several years before was very intriguing to me. She remembered that conversation and went further to describe her dilemma:

So this has to go back to really the Chinese way of thinking about nationality and face. I remember when I first came to the US, you know, with my husband and we were watching a TV figure skating competition and there was this Japanese, Japanese American figure skater, what's her name? You know, she won like, gold for the US team? You know this was 1995 and I pointed to the TV and said, "Oh that Japanese girl, you know she is amazing!" I was so excited. And my husband said, "That girl is American, she's not Japanese."

The dilemma for Sun is very personal because she has lived in the United States for more than 30 of her 50 years. Her take on being caught within the cultural construct of ethnic/cultural Chinese-ness and her identity as an American are brought forward with the Confucius Institute

project unlike anything else she has experienced living in the United States. As she goes on to say:

And I give you this example because it's just to say in the Chinese people's mind your face or where you were born or your heritage, to them is what you are. It doesn't matter where you were, what your eventual born is, American-born Chinese, or Chinese American or other Chinese, or nationality too. So, first of all that's the kind of things that are in their head. And they see other people, not just in the CI but in all other professional areas, they see the same thing. So that the Hanban people the first time they see my face they would always see me as Chinese. You cannot go beyond that.

This concept of “face” for Sun is both physical and metaphoric. She struggles with her cultural identity between being ethnically Chinese and culturally American. But “face” for Sun is also about her ethnicity in relation to her ideas regarding the Chinese concept of “face” as way of showing or conferring respect for herself and/or to others. For Sun the constant negotiation within this liminal space manifests itself in other forms as well, including even her name.

4.3 WHAT'S IN A NAME?

This dilemma is particularly acute for Sun as it pertains to her name. As she explains:

You know I have that over through the years, my name card, my business card is so complicated. Even though my name is Sun Xi Smith, no one, even through all the years, no one (from China) has ever called me Smith. No one ever calls me by my name,

they call me by my Chinese name, Sun Xi. And even you know many times in my global conference I even register online as Sun Smith and it shows up on my name badge as Sun Xi. I finally realized I could not fight it with them. That was my identity with them so I refused to fight it. I also realized so, I you know in so many years it's just.... even when I deal with the Chinese universities and they always call me you know Xi. Do I have to stop? Xi *yuanzhang* (director), Xi *laoshi* (teacher), Xi *zhuren* (executive director), so much. But the problem is say I am with my provost and they keep saying, 'Oh Xi *yuanzhang* has done such a great job bringing our two universities together,' and he absolutely had no idea who they were talking about! He just thought they must be talking about someone else.

So the dynamic that's not good. So then I thought so on my name card, one side is English and the other side is Chinese, right? So I now just say Sun DOT Smith. Still it's not going to work. They are just going to ignore that Smith part because I'm just Chinese because my face is Chinese even though my name is not. Now when you see your face, Michele, they will definitely not think that you are Chinese even if your name was Sun Smith they would not think of you as Chinese. They would consider that name. So that's number one, you cannot get over that. So with that in the first place already that I am removable.

For Sun the name dilemma is indicative of a deeper issue, one related to how she sees herself in relation to how other Chinese then also see her. The expectations based on race with Chinese nationals creates an ambiguity for Sun, and a sense of dissonance for her and within her own personal narrative. As she elaborates:

Then imagine from their (Hanban's) point of view, there is a situation, they would definitely think that I would be thinking like a Chinese, that I would consider it from a Chinese perspective, not that I would consider it from my American side. For you guys they would think, "Oh, first we have to explain it to them," you know? So that's one layer.

4.4 THE CONSORTIUM IMPACT

Sun spent a large portion of our interview laying out the historic context for how she considers this Chinese/American dilemma. It was obviously something she had spent a great deal of time considering and debating in her own head. I finally asked her, in what way had the Six Sisters Consortium helped her to resolve and negotiate this ambiguity she felt? She was quick to say that the consortium was a huge relief for her and helped her in so many ways to unpack this liminal space between her internal and external sense of who she was and how she handled things.

She admitted that sometimes she would use being Chinese and an "outsider" to her advantage, both within her university and within Hanban. But outsider in her context included several competing factors. Sun saw herself as a northerner in a southern town, as a New Englander at a very southern university, as a liberal in a more conservative academic campus, and as a somewhat Americanized person, especially when confronted and challenged by Chinese people in China. Her negotiated spaces were as much about reifying her own sense of herself within these competing constructs as they were about her understanding of when and how

to use which to her advantage. In this way, how to position herself and neutralize her internal battle for self-identity was aided by the member of the consortium.

Sun explains her relationship to the other women in the consortium in this way:

I'm an Americanized Chinese. So honestly, the reason that I say this is because the Chinese-ness, no matter how Americanized I am, I think I am, the Chinese-ness is always there. With the Sisters I think I benefit the most in that I get to see your guys point of view. I think because we talked about the last question, in that people see me as just Chinese/Chinese. And if I'm not careful I can be very comfortable and comfy just being that way. And that is what this group helps to pull me, not pull me back, but helps me to see a lot of things. There is a lot of things I can identify already. Like some other things I would really think 'oh yes that's true'. And that's the part where my Chinese-ness would overtake my American part. I couldn't see a certain perspective without you.

Sun goes on to frame this balance of selves through the trust she feels with the other Sisters and how that trust helped her to understand things from both perspectives. I will go into later how Sun is someone others also depend upon to unpack cultural innuendo since the other consortium members, regardless of their experiences in China, are still foreigners who grapple with understanding certain aspects of Hanban and their roles as non-Chinese. Sun often is the one to say to the other Sisters, "I think things are this way with so-and-so in Hanban," and her insight from that "Chinese-ness" perspective is invaluable to others.

As Sun explains the Sister consortium is part of her own balance of understanding both Hanban and her internal/external dialogue between culture and self. Sun trusts the women of this consortium to work from a perspective of mutual respect and care. As she says, “When someone sends out an email or a WeChat, you know, I was already beginning to just ready to pull out my hair over something, and then I see the email, and its just like ‘Oh! Someone else feels the way I do!’ It’s that kind of support. And also sometimes again then it’s my Chinese-ness. I’m saying, “Oh gosh, am I being too to the American side? Am being too American? (in reaction to a memo from Hanban) And then I see the group response, and I think, “Oh good! I’m not alone!”

The feeling of isolation, redemption, and community for Sun is something that was a thread by all the Sisters in the consortium. But it was trust and the way in which Sun trusts, implicitly, every member of this group, that she continues to come back to. As Sun says, “I feel too, I feel in this group is really like a support group. We understand each other’s work, yes, it’s in the same field. But and yet, we don’t we don’t compete with each other. With other colleagues, there may be that competition part. Well, the other colleagues, outside of CI I really don’t confide in so much. For two reasons, for two extreme reasons. One extreme, I don’t want other colleagues outside the CI, I don’t want to be seen as bragging. The other is I don’t want, it’s like competitive, I keep what I do like a secret from other colleagues in CI, like how I applied to Hanban in this way. I don’t want others to go to Hanban and say she has it, I don’t have it, and I want it, kind of thing. But with us, with the Sisters, I don’t have that kind of feeling.”

When I asked Sun to elaborate on why being part of the consortium has meaning for her she said:

It has meant a lot to me because I don't feel alone in this. Again, that goes back to that collective that you mentioned. I never feel like I am alone even going forward. I always feel like I have these Six Sisters behind. Or watching over, or doing the arm-in-arm thing that sisters do. And that's very, even though, I often say to my, I often say very proudly to my staff, that we are these Six Sisters, that we are together. I want to show them that we are one of the best. I think the other thing, the other important thing for all of us is that we are all high achievers. We want to do things and we want to do things the right way. And that's important too.

Sun emphasized that the power of the collective was something that helped her to negotiate within her university and within Hanban as well. But the friendships that went beyond just working relationships to other members of the consortium was of particular value to Sun:

We are one together, you know collective, supportive and we are able to be empathetic with each other. When something happens over there to one of us we feel for each other. And I just feel empowered. It's a good word, and I feel stronger. And I feel for most of the time, sharing is good, but for most of the time I don't feel like I am standing alone fighting this cultural war by myself, ever. Whether it is the university part or the Hanban part. I feel for my case because I did not see the university push back and I don't identify with those like so many of the other Sisters have experienced. But you guys have gotten the university pushback part, but I had the Hanban part. The support is huge. Sometimes it's even intangible. Sometimes intangible in that I will just be working

and start to think “I am done.” Or sometimes thinking, “I will send out something to ask one of the five.” And when I do, the response is quick.

One of the aspects of the relationships within the consortium is how the professional and the personal blend over into one another. When I asked Sun about this she said that she had several good friends within her professional life, but there was something more interpersonal about the Six Sisters than with other groups to which she associated. Sun said she thought our shared experiences regarding motherhood intersecting with our professional work is something that was different than other working groups to which she belonged mainly because of the number of times the job required us to be in China, sometimes for weeks at a time. Our roles as mothers often came up with this group because travel is a large piece of the directorships, and family schedules directly impacted our ability to go to China. The role of motherhood initially came up within our group because when we were established most of the women in the consortium had high school children, and some even had younger (elementary grade) kids. Because the job takes all of us in and out of China several times a year, how each of us were negotiating the schedules of our families with the schedules and crazy demands of the Confucius Institutes was a natural piece of the conversation.

Sun’s overall experience within the consortium was summed up by her belief that our shared common interest in quality and our ability to trust each other to deliver that quality made for a tighter bond between us. That we each had to negotiate family concerns with running the Institutes also created a sense that we each understood the demands beyond the job that impacted our ability to work. The notion that everyone was committed to working together, despite, not because of our outside obligations, was something she depended upon. Sun felt that this shared

knowledge of constraints and responsibilities was an added layer to the other ways in which we implicitly understood one another.

But beyond that, Sun also believed the Sisters, and thus the collective, created an opportunity to influence Hanban in a way that individual Confucius Institutes could not. As she said, “We need to seek every opportunity to educate Hanban, to help them understand that there should be a focus on quality, not just numbers. That we approach them both as a group, and then individually with the same things that one of us says, then another says it to them, you know. That is powerful.”

For Sun, the Confucius Institute was a source of strength based in reciprocity, trust, and acceptance. While Sun had a particular stance and relationship to China and her Chinese colleagues based on her ethnicity and thus her personal quandary related to identity, each member of the consortium had their own specific struggles and ambiguities that were brought to and sorted out with the other Sister members. In the next narrative, I explore how Celia approaches and manages from the place of being a kind of “third culture” or “outer” American and the role that plays in her understanding of her own personal sense of negotiating liminality.

5.0 CELIA

The surprising thing about Celia is how patriotic she is. I lead with this because on the spectrum of how one defines oneself, this is a notion that at first glance is not something to which someone would draw a conclusion about Celia. Celia is a former foreign service officer, and has been a China specialist for more than 30 years. Celia spent six years in Beijing working in the American Embassy and loved her career in the foreign service. Celia is a lovely study in contradictions: she is a white woman from a Midwest university, and her grasp on Chinese stuns both Americans and Chinese. I have been witness to several phone conversations when the person on the other end of the line (a Chinese national) did not realize Celia was a foreigner when she was speaking Mandarin to them. She is that good.

I mention these two things, Celia's patriotism and her Chinese language abilities, because in the world of international studies, the notion of any of us being patriots could easily be lost in the shuffle. And I mention it not because Celia opens with this, but because, for Celia, her negotiation of self-with-purpose and her struggle in the liminal space is often tied to and convoluted with her notion of what it means to be American. For Celia, being a negotiator, agitator, and conduit between China and the United States has, for many years, been tied into her own conflicted sense of what it means to be American and what her role is within the larger picture. Much like Sun's notion of identity related to race, Celia also struggles with the notion of

being the “other”. But, unlike Sun’s internal/external struggle based on cultural identity, Celia’s training, life experiences, and skill set is what she feels sets her apart.

5.1 THE OUTER AMERICAN

Celia grew up the daughter of an international businessman and she and I share a history of the nomadic childhood. More than any other member of the Sisters, I relate to Celia’s ambivalence and oddly patriotic tie to country and place. From my field notes I say, “I see how much Celia and I have in common, our shared childhood living abroad, as tramping from country to state, have shaped us in similar ways. We are both third culture Americans” (Field note, June 20, 2017).

The day of our interview we are sitting in the kitchen of my home. Celia has come to give a lecture to my Confucius Institute and to observe some distance education classes for which I have been concerned about standards and best practices. Her observation of my process and what could be improved was valuable since Celia has run one of the more comprehensive distance learning Chinese language programs in the Confucius Institute network. She is thoughtful and intense, funny, and disarming. In the relaxed setting of my kitchen we are able to talk at great length about so many aspects of the institutes, and about our lives, and about our research. Our relationship is close and easy, the way a friendship is between two people who do not always need to say much to be understood by the other.

I open our conversation by asking Celia to tell me about her experience of being a director of a Confucius Institute. She said she thought, in the beginning, running the institute

was very exciting because everything was new and everyone felt as if they were building something groundbreaking and different. As she explains,

I felt with my background and skills, I could bring all of those skills to bear in one place. I worked as a diplomat, and I worked as an interpreter, I have worked in various academic roles, I've worked with students and I thought, OK, I can really make a contribution here. And I really enjoyed, I really thought, I really think of things in the big picture in terms of U.S.-China relations, I think it really important that the U.S. engage with China. But I also realize that that relationship at times is very difficult and very challenging, and I realize that there are various people in our country who are addressing those differences, and are sometimes struggling with China to deal with those conflicts that we have with them.

But at the same time, we need other people who can work in areas where we can collaborate, in this more positive, more collaborative partnership areas if you will, to enable that relationship to be more positive and more resilient. And I feel personally comfortable that I can make a contribution in that area, in the collaborative area. And I guess this will sound kind of corny, but I am very patriotic.

Celia credits her living abroad as a child and her work as a diplomat as part of the way in which she works toward balance in her role and how she came to understand this role as both insider and observer to U.S.-Chinese relations:

I knew about [this] as a teenager as well since I lived overseas and my best friend's father was deputy chief of admissions, and I was friends with several diplomat's kids, and he taught me several things about what it meant to be a diplomat. And I think before that I didn't give a whole lot of thought to it. I've lived in quite a few different countries and I know what it means to represent your country. When you live overseas you represent your country whether you want to or not. And so if you are paying attention you gradually gain an awareness that this is an important thing. And that, and when you come back to your country, after you have been away for a while, at least in my case, and I think this is common with many people, you see it from the outside and from the inside at the same time. And you sort of see what's wonderful and beautiful about our country and all of our ugly faults as well.

Celia's interpretation of her role in the Confucius Institute is, as it is for many in this study, a challenge to balance what is right for the Institute, the correct path for the university, and what the Chinese perspective is as well. For Celia, her liminal state is a byproduct of both her childhood and her previous professional experience.

It really does require I think, being inside and outside at the same time, all the time. I feel like, as I mentioned, I am a patriotic American, I think it is important to serve my country. I think it is important to have this kind of engagement with China. I also realize in order to make that engagement effective, I need to try and understand the Chinese point of view.

She elaborates:

I think they are, the Chinese point of view, is we are investing a lot of money, into this, and that this money is being, some of it at any rate, whether it is true or not we can problematize, but, this money is taken from educational funds that could be used to educate poor children in rural China and so it is meaningful that we have decided to invest this money.

MH: You mean the Chinese government feels this way?

Celia: The Chinese government feels this way. And truly there's been a lot of discussion amongst the Chinese people and the Chinese press as well, there has been pushback as well, with them saying, you know, why are we sending money to developed countries like the United States [through the CI network] to educate their children when not all of our children are getting a fair education? And it's a good question. So the answer, from those who support the CI program within the Chinese government and the Chinese public is that this is an investment toward goodwill toward China. So they want to do things that create goodwill towards China. And the idea is that teaching children in the United States to speak Chinese will give those children a positive attitude toward China. They also add other things in there that are more difficult for us to do.

MH: Who do you mean by us?

Celia: The Americans.

5.2 STRIKING THE BALANCE

When I ask Celia to elaborate on a time where the U.S. directors were asked to do something that put them in conflict with the interests of either the U.S. or their home institutions, Celia tells a story related to the launching of Confucius Institute Day. Confucius Institute Day was an initiative whereby the Chinese government wanted the U.S. government to recognize a national holiday for the work of the Confucius Institutes. The U.S. directors were asked to help support this initiative by hosting Confucius Institute Day on campuses and were asked to lobby within the universities and within our state legislatures to try and persuade the state/federal government body that this would be an excellent way to highlight the work of the Confucius Institutes in the United States.

Celia explains that for most U.S. Confucius Institute directors there is a constant weighing of how one will use their political and cultural capital within their universities, and when engaging with our governmental relations offices so we save the firepower for events (such as the visit of the Vice Premier of China) or instances (such as visa issues for incoming teachers or scholars) that have more direct impact on how the institutions can function. Celia recalled that asking Confucius Institute directors to push for something as public and high profile as a national Confucius Institute Day was met with a great deal of resistance from several U.S. Confucius Institute directors mainly because many saw this as a waste of precious leveraging capacities with state governance or within the governmental offices who oversee these things on behalf of the university:

And you have to be really careful that when you do something like the Confucius Institute Day, if you're just celebrating CI and Chinese that's great. But, if you are trying

to make it a national holiday that other languages don't get, then it's not going to play well and it's going to have a counter effect. I'm not sure how we went about explaining that...

Celia explained that from the Chinese perspective the Confucius Institute directors were seen as stonewalling the effort to create positive momentum around the good work of the Confucius Institutes. From the U.S. side, many of the director's felt the effort would not just be futile, but could potentially backfire if the process were seen as overreach by the Chinese government to use the Confucius Institutes as a means to influence directly or indirectly within the processes of U.S. or state interests.

Celia also recognizes that she considers respect to be something that she understands from the Chinese perspective (much like Sun's understanding of "face" in this respect) but sometimes brings her American side to the equation when it comes to dealing with China and protocol. She says,

That is a cultural conflict within me sometimes. I tend to respect American practice is to be polite but true respect is earned. I have true respect for people who have worked hard and then earned it. People come in with fancy titles and then behave in a fashion that is lazy and rude and inconsiderate. I don't have much respect for. I try to be Chinese enough to be polite, deferential in public, but they can probably sense that it's not always heartfelt.

This conflict for Celia relates back to her own American/Chinese internal conflict and the roles she feels she needs to play in order to get the work accomplished.

5.3 LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

One of the central complaints of the Confucius Institute Six Sisters was a lack of transparency from Hanban and the need to form a coalition in order to better understand the messages and demands being asked of the directors. Celia saw this lack of transparency not as an intentional misrepresentation by the Chinese government, but more steeped in the culturally specific ways information is shared (or not) in Chinese society. Many of the Sisters understood the underpinnings of the opaque communications style, however, also believed that this approach did not help in coming to concrete solutions regarding best practices. The consortium became a kind of clearing house for information, and a way in which everyone could decide, together, a course of action which could be both doable and beneficial. As one of the other Sisters said in her interview, “It is as if we are all blind people who are only holding on to one piece of an elephant and trying to describe to others what it was we are holding. By each of us sharing our piece we could see the whole animal, not just the trunk, or a tail, or the leg.”

The lack of transparency, in the beginning, was frustrating for many of the Sister directors but the formation of the consortium helped to eliminate some of that ambiguity. For Celia, this sharing of information was particularly important:

I just thought, wow, here are other people who are actually feeling the same kind of things that I was feeling. It was so reassuring. So comforting to me. Because so

many things, for example, one of the things that was so frustrating for me and for all of us, is that HB [Hanban] sends out these announcements and these instructions. And sometimes they are translated into English and sometimes they are not. And sometimes they are sent to us directly and sometimes only to the Chinese partner-director. And even if you can read the Chinese, which I can, and even if the English translation is decent, which it usually isn't, it still is not transparent. And that is because these instructions are predicated on a set of assumptions that we all don't share, or that I don't share. And so you have to go and read between the lines to figure out what exactly it is that they mean by this. And what exactly is it they want me to do?

Celia concedes that a lack of transparency is not something intentional by our Chinese colleagues in Hanban, but more a way in which "things are done" in China. She also concedes that what we perceive as a lack of transparency could also be a matter of a cultural disconnect regarding how information is disseminated or shared. As she elaborates,

In theory you should just be able to read the instructions, look at those rules and apply them. But as you go through them really carefully and look at the terminology it is all based on a certain assumption that we don't necessarily all share. I don't even think [Hanban] thinks about us as China specialists. They just think, "This is how a budget works and in our world this is how a budget works so you must understand that too. What we mean by "left over", or what we mean by "establishing a project", or what we mean by "project", the definition of "project", is understood in our world". And I don't think it even occurs to them that there could be another definition. It doesn't occur to

them that this could be interpreted differently in another culture, in another society. I don't think they are being deliberately obfuscatory. On the contrary, I think they are trying to write things out that they think are very clear. I don't think they are trying to miscommunicate. I think they are trying to regularize, standardize, and make it as clear as possible. But the fact of the matter is what is a "project" is interpreted differently in the United States, and Hungary, and Botswana, you know, and Beijing. And so all these places are going to look at that as something different.

This distinction between intentional misdirection and simple cultural disconnect is important because for many of the Sisters there was a fine line between deliberate obfuscation by their Chinese colleagues (which some consortium members felt was part of the overall "terms of engagement") and/or simple matters of miscommunication. What was clear though was this ambiguity in communication style created a space where members of this consortium in general, and Celia in particular, felt a need to seek out the support of the others in order to come to logical solutions to requests from Hanban. For Celia, this lack of transparency coupled with her temporal and spatial isolation from others who understood her work, added to her feelings of isolation and loneliness.

5.4 ISOLATION AND SUPPORT

Celia works in Midwestern University, in the center of a politically red state and a place where many local politicians have voiced concern over the Confucius Institute program in the local press and through other outlets. Celia constantly works on creating a positive image of the

Confucius Institute to the greater public, not just because she believes in it, but also because she sees this as part of her mission to educate others about the importance of understanding China from a perspective that includes positive action and energy. Celia's liminal space includes being a liberal in a conservative state, loving her country while trying to get those around her to understand a nation that her local press had deemed to be the enemy, and working within a university system that does not always understand the greater impact her work has for the university agenda with regards toward a broader platform for engagement with China. These sets of competing issues create ambivalence and anxiety for Celia regarding whether her work has true meaning and impact and whether she can continue to reinvent the way in which she presents and pushes the Confucius Institute/China agenda. In this way, the Sisters and Celia's ability to reach someone at any time was a source of strength and resiliency, not just in her professional life but in her personal life as well.

As she says,

What was really important on this issue and a lot of other issues, was really personal and emotional. I felt that I was not alone. Because at my university, I truly believe that no one at my university truly understands or believes what it is I do and you know, I will report on something and they will be like, fine, fine, go away, basically. Or what does that mean? So, an issue like [our agreement expiring] was a little bit frustrating and a little bit scary because your agreement is expiring, ok is this going to create a legal problem? You know, it's a little scary like that. But knowing my friends at other R1 universities had the same problem, and that these are all very capable, experienced, managers.... And China hands. I mean had both skill sets. One has an MBA and there

was a lot of managerial experience and everyone was saying, “We can handle this, we can weather this. We’re OK.” It gave me some personal reassurance. I felt less vulnerable.”

For Celia, she trusts the women of the Six Sisters in a way that she acknowledges has much to do with how the group helps her to alleviate feelings of isolation and ambiguity. Celia feels particularly vulnerable because of some harsh criticism in the local press but found solace from other Sister directors who had experienced similar criticism. As she notes,

I think at times it is demoralizing for us personally. At least it is for me personally sometimes. Because I can’t ... I can’t. ...First of all, it is true, there is some huge differences between the United States and China, and it is also true that sometimes China does things that my government doesn’t approve of and I don’t approve of. And they do things both internationally and to their own people that I think are not good. But I also recognize that it is inevitable that these two large countries that have very strong positions within the world are at times going to be in conflict. This is a very long, very old culture that has been through many, many changes, many traumatic periods and there is a reason why they have adopted certain stances, whether you agree with them or not. You know, it doesn’t excuse certain things that they have done but there are certain reasons for them. And I believe very strongly that we need to stay engaged with China and staying engaged with China does not mean that you agree with them on everything. Its Ok to disagree. And this is where I differ with those vocal critics who for some reason they think we can stick our heads in the sand and have nothing to do with China

and this is not in the best interest of our country. I think that we need to maintain a dialogue with our counterparts in China, we need to stay engaged.

But sometimes taking those criticisms, taking those hits, because the one person that has been critical in the local press, my local town, has been a bit personal about it. Has even used my name on a couple of occasions. And that was pretty hurtful, and I knew him. I tried not to let it bother me even though I thought it was hurtful. And my family said, “Oh just ignore it.” And some of the leadership in the university also said just ignore it, but it hurt me, it upset me. And that was another time that being able to talk to some of the other sisters really helped me. I’ve talked to a couple of people, Jane for example, who had similar experiences. Just being able to talk about it, just to be able to share those experiences made me feel better. So again, less alone.

5.5 FRIENDSHIP AND TRUST

For Celia, her liminal space is located within this isolation and a lack of colleagues who understand, not just her role with China, but her overall job at the university. Celia also lives in a suburban area of a relatively conservative town. Adding to her anxieties regarding her work life is that she was recently relocated from one campus to another as the university tries to consolidate her role within a larger China mission. Trusting the Sister directors when she feels this kind of isolation is a significant part of how Celia manages her role within the liminal space. She uses the metaphor of “sisters” to describe this in more detail:

I do see it as a sisterly thing in that you know, sisters have alliances with each other. They are in the same boat with one another whether they want to be or not. I am talking about biological sisters. You have the same parents. And in a sense, we have this same experience too. We are all in this boat. I am mixing metaphors, I know. But we are all in this boat together. And we can choose to compete, snipe at one another, undermine each other if we want. But we choose to all get in and row. And in the end, you know we are all going to be better off if we help each other.

Because there is so much shared time together and because the personal and professional have played a significant role for the women of this consortium, I asked Celia to explain to me why she felt there was so much shared good will between members of the group. Celia believed the combination of work load, long periods of time away from our families, and the shared belief in the importance of our work contributed to this deep commitment from and to one another. But also Celia believed there was a level of integrity that these women brought to the process that was part of her own personal standard for correct behavior. As she notes,

I have seen evidence that people will misrepresent their statistics to HB [Hanban] in order to get an award, that sort of thing, and that's not part of my own personal code, so I don't want to be a part of it. And I know that the other women in this group are not like that. It doesn't mean that we won't strategize or find a way to show ourselves in a positive light. But they are not going to be, they are not going to try and fabricate data.

And I don't know if it is only women who do this but particularly this group of women, we have all been supportive of one another on the personal side as well. You

know we all have our various personal problems, challenges that we face. And it's been really helpful to me to be able to talk about my personal life with others. And I try to listen to them as well. And I've gotten some really good encouragement and advice from people when I have felt really down. We are all women of a certain age (laughs) and we all have children, and some of us have younger children and some of us have older children. But we all understand what it means to be a working mother and wife and try to negotiate all these personal relationships and life at the same time we are in a very demanding job. And that the stresses of the job spill over into our personal lives. And vice-versa, I guess. And I don't know if it is only women who do this but particularly this group of women, we have all been supportive of one another.

Celia believes that both the personal and professional relationships have worked to having her stay within the network and have been instrumental in helping her to negotiate her varying and competing ambiguities.

5.6 EXTERNAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

When I asked Celia to elaborate on the Chinese government's acknowledgment of the group and what it meant she had this to say:

I was really flattered and thrilled when [Hanban] started calling us the *liu jiemei* (six sisters), because it acknowledged our friendship and alliance in a positive way. Like

at first I think they were, like you have said, they were taken aback, like whoa, these people are talking to one another. We have to be careful what we say to them.

MH: It could be seen as a good thing or dissent, right?

Celia: Exactly! They could easily have seen it as conspiratorial and dissenting, right. Which is a cultural thing. They set things up for competition and jealousy and resentment. [Hanban] gives one group this and not that group. So, we came along and said, “To hell with that. We are going to partner rather than compete with one another.” I think they were surprised by that at first. But then they decided it was a positive thing and called us the Six Sisters, and I was thrilled.

For Celia Hanban’s recognition of the group was important but it was also very encouraging to her that she was a member of this group. Being associated with the group eased Celia’s sense of isolation and made her feel she had reliable people to turn to that would support her unconditionally:

I thought wow, that’s really cool. It, for me, I was very flattered to be included in this group. Because as these are, first of all, prestigious universities, and very accomplished members of this group. I have tremendous admiration for the members of this group. Everyone in this group has accomplished so much and that I got to be included with this group was like, wow! I was very flattered.

The group also acted as a kind of emotional support for Celia in that, much like other members of this consortium, the physical reality of their lives (suburban or rural communities)

created isolation in many forms. For Celia, having the Sisters “out there” either just as a psychological force or in reality through social media or text messages offered her a great deal of comfort. This external presence meant a great deal to her:

Emotional support. For me. I don’t think that will be true for everyone but for me just knowing there are people I can talk to is important. And that I can talk about professional and personal problems and that I don’t need to explain it to them because they will understand exactly what I mean. Without the consortium, I would feel so much more isolated, and I would have a lot more self doubt. And this might just be my own insecurities, you know because I can read Chinese really well, and I can speak Chinese well, and I feel I can communicate with my Chinese counterparts really well, and I understand their cultural values, etc. etc. But, because I am working in this space, this liminal space that you call it, between the US and China, there are always judgments to make. I know if I didn’t have these other friends to talk to I would be so much more anxious all the time, worried that I would make the wrong choices. Recommend the wrong things.

For Celia, the consortium became a place for her to feel a spiritual and emotional home and granted her the opportunity to be a leader among a group of women who admired her for her expertise and thoughts. But the Six Sisters also helped to ease her sense of isolation and ambiguity as she negotiated the multiple realms she lived within the liminal space.

For many of the Sisters there is a recognition of the struggles each has with other Confucius Institute members who are not in the consortium, and even some slight, friendly

internal competition amongst each other. But each of the members also acknowledged the inherent exclusivity of the Six Sisters Consortium which Celia believed was necessary because of the external pressure from Hanban for the Institute's to compete against one another. Yet, as is brought out in the next narrative, Laura recognized the group's exclusivity as a way that the Sisters maintained the "brand" and gave her comfort when she sometimes felt the overall Confucius Institute program might head in a direction with which she was not comfortable.

6.0 LAURA

I arrange to meet Laura while on a business trip to the west coast. Since I was going to be there for several days, I rented a small bungalow in a compound of similar bungalows all of which had been built in the 1920's. The bungalows are a historic part of this large and diverse city and were once the property of Charlie Chaplin. The setting is beautiful and serene, with small fountains dotting the courtyards and each bungalow graced with large French doors that take advantage of the temperate weather. It is a lovely place to conduct the interview and sets a relaxed tone to our conversation.

I refer to Laura in my notes as “the Skeptic.” I think this is partially because Laura is one of those high-energy people whose brilliance and enthusiasm can fill a room, but she also has a nose for nonsense and does not tolerate those she does not feel are working from a space of attention or purpose. She is spirited, funny, and quick. If there is a moment when among the Six Sisters we are all in need of comic relief, it is usually Laura who will provide us with insight, or an irreverent fact.

Laura hails from Pacific West Coast University (PWCU), in a predominately politically blue state, and one of the most progressive and culturally diverse cities within the Confucius Institute network of places. This progressive diversity is important because it means the set of demands and constraints that Laura faces within her university and within her region are somewhat different than for other members within the consortium. It is also significant because

Laura herself appears to be a reflection of the world and environment in which she lives and works: expansive, sunny, inclusive, and complex.

Laura is seen by the other Sister directors as someone who often sets the larger agenda for projects that we can back and develop nationally. With her academic background in Chinese opera and the arts, Laura's focus with her Confucius Institute is often centered on incorporating the arts and students from both the Pacific West Coast University community and beyond by supporting various dance, visual arts, or other projects that incorporate both traditional and modern Chinese art forms. But Laura's work does not just cover the arts. She also is open to a variety of projects which she knows can be developed to help inform the public about China from a wide range of foci and sources. For example, Laura's work organizing and launching an exhibit at PWCU about the Shanghai Jewish refugees who lived in China during World War II became the centerpiece of the Six Sisters' efforts to fund and send the exhibit to some 20 other institutes and cities around the world. In this way, Laura's ambition is to oversee the formation of Confucius Institute projects and programs that are associated with academic scholarship.

6.1 THE LIMINAL SPACE

Laura's Confucius Institute is unlike any of the other programs within the Six Sister consortium. Not only does Laura not have a teacher-intern component or Chinese language project, but her focus on the arts as a means to understand China gives her a kind of latitude that other Confucius Institutes do not always have. But Laura has had some issues within the university in that the Institute, without a mission identifiable by the university as being within the core purpose, has been moved from one department to another, and from one building to another over the course of

eight years. This move does not seem to concern Laura much, but does add to her frustration over how she must manage the professional agenda for the Confucius Institute, and how the Confucius Institute can best fit into the larger dynamics of Chinese studies for PWCU. As she puts it,

I became the director of the CI sort of by accident. I had been hired by PWCU to be the director of programming for the summer sessions and um, summer session is a time at PWCU that is open to the rest of the world and you have a lot of flexibility in how you can offer various classes. So, I was hired by them to develop programs, academic programs, that went outside of the normal six to eight week normal classes. And I was focused a lot in building arts programs, and also international programs at this because a lot of Chinese students were interested in coming to PWCU to study in the summer. So, I had that background, but it just happened that I had a Ph.D. in theater focused on China and an undergraduate degree in Chinese language and Asian studies. So, I had the China ability. The CI project came through that office, our office, and I was asked to build it in addition to the other programs I was already overseeing. But I did not formally apply, it was just something I was asked to help develop and then it developed into something.

Though Laura did not initially think the Confucius Institute was a good fit for the university she said that her boss at the time encouraged her to try and fit the Confucius Institute into the larger study abroad programs. Laura was hesitant to do this because she thought without full support from within the university community, and the goals of Hanban which she

understood might not also be the goals of PWCU, that from the beginning there were going to be unique issues to running the Confucius Institute.

The liminal space for Laura resides with these in-between spaces she negotiates as an administrator, scholar, and China expert. With her background in Chinese studies, Laura understood that there were going to be things that the Chinese government might ask of the Institute that would be hard to implement, with or without university buy-in. Her background in running arts projects at the community level, and understanding university politics as a former faculty member, had her entering into the Confucius Institute project as a rather reluctant participant. She notes,

When the project was initially proposed for PWCU, I had a chance to do some research, and what other schools were doing to participate. And having a China background I was hesitant. If it had been up to me I probably would have told PWCU no, don't do it, don't take on the project. I really couldn't see the value of it and I couldn't see how it lined up with the university's core values.

6.2 THE BRAND CHALLENGE

The challenge for Laura, and an additional piece of the negotiation over the liminal space for her is how to oversee a “brand” for which you do not necessarily have complete control over. As she says,

It's very challenging in the sense that you are always fighting against a brand that you don't control. So that in the sense starting out with something that you didn't have the full university support and having not being able to control the brand. Every university has a CI and some are doing it quite well and some are doing it less well, but you are all tied in to the same brand. And that's been a challenge. How do you change perceptions of the CI brand to colleagues at PWCU, and then out in the community when this other type of press is often generated? So that I think has been a challenge to define you know, one is the brand, and two to find that pathway that for programming for the campus that serves the mission of the university, makes a mark, and has an impact on the city. That is really challenging.

Liminality, thus for Laura, is the struggle to establish the Confucius Institute into a reliable and recognizably scholarly/thoughtful program that does not just slap a name on something and move forward. For Laura, controlling the outside perception of the Confucius Institute while managing the internal realities sets up tensions and ambiguity that she feels is one of the bigger challenges of the job. For Laura, the internal and external negotiations to control this "brand" means she must use various methods of collaboration and partnerships that boost the outside perception of the programs she oversees. She does this by selecting partnerships that have a high public profile, and then collaborates on projects with these groups to elevate the brand of the Confucius Institute for both PWCU and the overall national brand of Confucius Institutes.

What I did from the get-go was always building a project in partnership with a PWCU faculty member or some non-profit that is considered a known expert in its field, for example, the California world languages program run by the state of California. So that I can ensure that I am always establishing a network of trust and so when they look at what I am doing and they can see who I am with they can tell that I have a network of experts. My grandfather used to say, “Show me your friends and I will tell you who you are”. And I’ve made that a philosophy about the people I work with, and who I associate with. “Now does that help you? Now do you trust me?” And slowly, slowly, slowly, by doing this for many years, I feel I am now at a place that I have trust, and very prominent spokespersons, people I have worked with who now would come up and say, “I think the work of the CI and PWCU and the programs of CI are fantastic!” But it has taken a long time, you know, keeping my head down at some point and picking my head up at other points, and not just pushing through with it. And it’s not about me. It’s about the work.

6.3 TRUST AND HANBAN

For Laura, trust plays out in many forms through her work life, both with other colleagues, with her counterparts within the Chinese government, and with other Confucius Institute directors. When it comes to working with the Chinese government in particular, Laura is clear that she has spent years developing a platform for trust that she uses to push her agenda with film and art in a way that shows she is beyond the fray of perceived influence from China that is often associated with the Confucius Institute projects. For Laura, she worked with her colleagues both at PWCU and in China to establish rapport that would allow her to continue the work she knows is

important, so the basis of trust between her and all her colleagues remain intact. For example, Laura often supports film screenings with various other departments within PWCUC realizing that some of those films might not be films that the Chinese government considers to be favorable. As Laura explains,

I think, there's two layers of trust or two avenues of trust. There's trust within the PWCUC community that um, which has taken time to build up. To be able to demonstrate to people through the programming, through the content of the programs and through the partnerships that I build around our programs that show that our programs are clear of any type of oversight or mandate from China. I have to make that very, very clear. I have since the get-go been very conscience of my position. I am not ladder faculty at PWCUC so one of my original hesitations to taking on the CI from the beginning was that I was concerned that it would be perceived by faculty that this was something I was creating for myself.

Laura's negotiation of her beliefs of what can be good from Confucius Institute and good for PWCUC is part of her overall continual reaffirmation as the broker of that trust between the university and Hanban. But Laura is quite clear that she leads on both sides (with PWCUC and Hanban) with a deeply committed sense of cultural awareness regarding the pitfalls for all stakeholders:

But also, the trust thing, working with Hanban and China, what people don't give enough attention to is what happens back stage. The diplomacy that is taking place

between universities all around the world and China and how we are trying, and we are changing them [Hanban] in the way that we are building that trust. I am you know, pushing programs, for example, through our film programs. I am showing films that are not approved by China. Which is not all that unusual. You will see films all around the world that are screened and not approved by the Chinese government but they're not, you know, they're not screened in China. But that I've also said to Hanban, "If you let me and trust me to screen the films that I want, because it is our curator and our curatorial team that chooses these films. I do not participate in the creation of the curation of that program. I leave it to the people who are the professionals in their field. But my promise to you is that when we do present films we will always present them in context. We will never just present something as propaganda. It will always be academic or creative context showing why it is important to show this film in this context. You know, whatever the artistic piece is. So, I am working with the Chinese, you know, and you are building this diplomacy and trust between us. You know, so I can push the envelope a bit more, which at the same time allows me to create more interesting programs. Pushing [Hanban] beyond their comfort zone is, like with film, is, you know, that's not their language. It's not Hanban's language. Their thing is language, not film, not art, language programs are what we are to present. So, by letting me create a palette of programs that makes sense for the university has been an interesting process for the Chinese to get on board with.

Laura's acknowledgment of the level of trust that is exhibited between her and Hanban is emblematic of the kind of latitude she is then allowed within her Confucius Institute program

from Hanban. Rather than trying to fit Chinese language programs into a schema that would not fit for the overall mission of PWCU, Laura forged her own path and was given a great deal of leeway to carve the Institute into something that both fit with her own personal interests and within the mission of PWCU.

6.4 SIX SISTERS AND THE CLARITY OF PURPOSE

Laura's notion of these reliable and value-oriented partnerships that she seeks on campus or within her city community certainly blends into her relationship with the other women within the consortium. Again, trust plays out as a bonding principle and to Laura the thing she believes is emblematic of the Sister director consortium is what she refers to as "clarity of purpose." This, for Laura, goes back to the notion of brand management as well. With so many Institutes globally and so many competing agendas within the Confucius Institute global network, having people you can trust to deliver at the level and with the same sense of purpose was very important to Laura. She uses a metaphor from Chinese opera to state her point:

One thing is I think is that these women keep a very clear perspective on what they are dealing with. What they are dealing with on their campuses and what they are dealing with in China. In Chinese culture, in theater for example, you don't see tragedies on stage. They aren't into tragedies. Even if you have a play where the heroine finds no way out her situation she might commit suicide, usually she comes back as a ghost to get revenge, you know? If she can't do it in this life they are at least going to give her an out

to do it again. Or maybe they will create a big memorial in her honor. But the Chinese are not about tragedy. They like to have things to have some sort of happy ending.

And that traditional idea that it's got to be happy can roll over to the public manifestation of CI [at meetings and other events] where everything is great and happy and wonderful and everyone should be wearing fancy clothes and the high heels and that's what makes it good. Where that isn't always our perspective. To us it's not always what is on the outside, it's like what's on the inside that is much more important. So, I think for this group of women, we are always looking at the bigger picture. It doesn't matter if everyone is lined up and everyone has a reward in their hand. That's not really what matters. And I think we are always looking at what is impactful. And we're not there necessarily, not even necessarily, we don't please Hanban. That's not our goal to please Hanban. We are very happy to work with Hanban, but our goal, we keep in mind, what our universities need, number one. What our programs need and our communities need are number one. It is not about pleasing Hanban at all. And I think within this network of women I see a seriousness about that.

For Laura she returns to the brand metaphor and how these women create a kind of clarity of purpose that binds each to one another:

Clarity, yes. I absolutely believe that. Absolutely. Absolutely. Because there is a clarity of purpose you can know that, knowing that this group of people has a clear balance. At least from the perspective of PWCU, because I always feel like I am trying

to keep the balance, I feel like, I can associate myself and PWCU with this group of people and not have to risk PWCU, to risk my brand. Right? That's really important.

Laura also believes there was something about the Six Sisters in particular that made the consortium both workable and necessary was the common way in which everyone understood there was, as she puts it “on-stage China and off-stage China,” and when everyone stepped “off stage,” is when the Sisters understood the true agenda:

Having colleagues that we can debrief with, to commiserate with, you know, when we have to go to all these big meetings with China and you know, it's often times it's this thing where everything is pretty, everything is ceremonial, and you just want to have something more in-depth discussion and results, and something real. But we know that this is all really important to the Chinese. So then when they step off stage, then we all know that is when the real work begins.

For Laura, she felt the real success of the Six Sisters was both in the group itself as coming together to sort out the ambiguity and competing messages each of us received from our Chinese counterparts, but also what we were ultimately able to do for Hanban. One of the foundations of the Six Sisters is our ability to create programs that we feel benefit both our universities and the brand for Hanban, such as the national exhibition of the Shanghai refugees. But we also formed small teams that would go to newly formed Confucius Institutes and help those fledgling programs to determine practices that could be best implemented for them to

succeed. Laura described these efforts by the Six Sisters and the way our work was received by Hanban in this way:

I think it was a surprise to Madam Xu [the head of Hanban] and a very pleasant surprise to her. Because all of us were not only interested in what we could take from them, but we were also interested in helping them to improve what they were doing.

It was a reciprocity. So they would reach out to Celia for example, and ask, “Would you comment on this certain policy? What do you think about this idea about more accountability in the accounting system?” So they would come up to me and say, “What do you think about the conference agenda? What do you think of the topics?” And I would edit it and help make it sound more in line with western verbiage of how you would do it. Or they would reach out to you about models, structures, handbooks. Or Jane. They asked Jane to speak to the incoming Chinese partner schools network so she could talk about how to successfully work in the United States with partner schools. So they asked us to help advise them and how to improve and we were sharing information and we were willing to give back and I think they saw that as a win-win.

6.5 FRIENDSHIPS

There was a point a few years ago where all the Sisters were invited to a conference in Hawaii. Due to a visit of a high-ranking official to our campus I was attending the conference a bit later than the other women. The consortium members decided to rent a house for a few days and take some time off before the meeting and they had a lovely time swimming in the ocean, cooking,

and taking time to walk and talk. I asked Laura about this time together and she had some interesting insights regarding that week:

It was great. But even without it the friendships would still be there. Every time we meet it deepens. You know. I wouldn't say that Hawaii was the most amazing thing. That was nice and we did get to have some great downtime but it wasn't a deal breaker. Because I feel like every time we go to these meetings we just find each other. We are on WeChat saying, "What hotel are staying at? And what is happening?" It's like a huddle in a football game. We huddle. Right? Between each play. And maybe it is a three- or four-hour huddle, but we come together and we debrief...you know.

When I ask Laura to elaborate on how the consortium friendships are different from other relationships she has with other colleagues she said that she felt the overall structure of what we do, coupled with the ambiguity of our roles, aided in our bond to one another. To Laura, she has many professional-level relationships with colleagues and others, but the bond she feels to this particular group of women, and the peer friendships she has acquired through the consortium were somehow different. This sentiment was expressed by most of the members of the consortium and is something I feel myself about this group of women. There is something about working within these multiple roles as China expert, Confucius Institute director, wife, mother, and professional, that all of these women share. Laura felt that the particular balance act between traveling all over the world, negotiating our positions, and trying to stay the course as administrators and diplomats, created a solidifying bond between this particular group of women. As she says,

We are already doing a tough job, but in addition to the tough job we are all dealing with these family and personal issues. We're all having to sort of balance. It's always a balancing thing for women. I guess when I say things to my husband, you know, about, this weekend, he's off working or doing something on the weekend, and I say, "But we have to get this done", and he'll just look at me and say, "Well, that's your choice. That's your choice that you want to get that done". And I will say, "But we have to do it because there are the kids or this or that". And I think that is a very different place that women come from. You always are thinking about the depth of the entire thing. We up here doing the Hanban stuff, I'm there doing the Hanban stuff over here, but I am always thinking about my kids, I'm always thinking about my husband, da da da. And I don't know that he necessarily all day in his job is constantly thinking about all this big picture stuff that is behind it.

Laura said also that the Sister consortium helped to ease her own sense of ambivalence about being in the Confucius Institute project altogether. She believes, as most of the Sister directors believe, that the mission of the Confucius Institute is what propels her forward and keeps her engaged in the entire process despite the difficulties and marginalization and isolation she sometimes feels. She believes that part of the isolation stems from a lack of individuals within her professional circle that understand what it is she does, and why she believes her mission is so important. As she notes,

I think Americans, despite what side of the political spectrum, they think they know. They think they get China, they know it, they've read about it in the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* and they know it. They've got it. And that is absolutely absurd.

And so feeling this isolation, it's that often times there are not those people who you necessarily can run to at your university who understand your perspective on China. But it is also a glass half full on the perspective with China. You know, it's way more than half full. You know, the direction that China is going in, compared to where we are going, and what some of us understand and know about where China has been.... You know, some of us go way back to the 70's and 80's. We grew up in parts of Asia, have studied this you know, and we've seen it. We know where its going. And it's going in the right direction, it's just you know. What we know.

The Six Sisters Consortium for Laura then is both a basis for friendship but also a source of uncompromising support from a group of people who share her values and sees the ideal of working for the greater good as a precursor to being a member. For Laura, there is comfort and reassurance, and a sense of renewed purpose by working directly with this group of women and a negotiation of working through the liminal aspects of the job and her life which these women share.

7.0 JANE

I refer to Jane in my notes as my “cautious” participant. Jane, more than any other Confucius Institute Sister directors was very thoughtful about what she would say when I was recording her and preferred to stick to a sanctioned party line. Her answers to my question were often measured and seemed to stay within the realm of what we as Confucius Institute directors say when we are being interviewed by the press. Understanding this about Jane is part of this analysis regarding who she is in context of this research and toward my understanding of her feelings of being reticent for this interview. However, off-tape Jane was her normal, open, funny, irreverent self, which also lends to the conclusion that our friendship and relationship to one another is solidified on other grounds beyond the scope of this project. For this particular analysis then, my relationship to Jane is front and center and I realize that it is only because it is me that she agreed to participate at all. For this I am enormously grateful and work through this analysis from the perspective of interpreting her interview in relation to who we are to one another and the importance of that relationship for both of us. In the conclusion in Chapter 10, I examine this notion of relationship and narrative analysis to consider Jane, and the other Sisters from this etic/emic perspective.

7.1 FROM THE BEGINNING

Jane is from Central Midwestern University (CMWU), a beautiful Research 1 school with a huge faculty, diverse student body, and excellent academic reputation. I arrive to visit Jane on a stunningly bright and sunny May day. Jane was very generous with her time, and even scheduled an afternoon for me to be able to meet with her local charter school that runs one of the more progressive K-5th grade Chinese language immersion programs in the U.S. The visit to the school was very instrumental as I was able to see kids learning algebra and taking science classes all in Mandarin. The student body included both heritage speakers (American-born Chinese) as well as western students with no Chinese heritage background. The partnership that Jane and the university had to this charter school was but one example of the excellent work Jane has been able to accomplish in her years working in Chinese studies at CMWU and was emblematic of her influence and role within the local K-12 community to support and develop Chinese language initiatives.

Jane came to CMWU in 1997 to work at the China center and was instrumental in the early discussions the university had to bring a Confucius Institute to campus. Jane said the university spent a great deal of time discussing the pros and cons of establishing a Confucius Institute. The CMWU Confucius Institute was finally opened in 2008 and Jane shifted her position over to becoming the Confucius Institute director. Jane's Confucius Institute has a central focus of supporting Chinese language initiatives within the local community by sponsoring Hanban teacher candidates, training those candidates, and placing them into public, private, and charter schools. More than any other Confucius Institute, Jane's program and mine dovetail in kind and purpose, though our management of the programs and scope are somewhat different. One of the challenges of supporting a teacher training program is the notion that given

the excellent Chinese language program that already existed on her campus, Confucius Institute related Chinese language programs would only exist as an outreach effort into the local community. Much like the programs my Confucius Institute oversees, Confucius Institute language programs at CMWU do not compete with the departmental Chinese language initiative on campus. As Jane explains, the balance for her as the senior administrator is to recognize the academic mission of the Chinese language department on campus and not interfere with that program:

Early on, certainly, the Chinese side wanted to send as many teachers as possible and given our role as an education outreach mission, our philosophy is that we don't teach Chinese on campus. We do do some kinds of general classes but our noncredit campus classes are considered to be not very rigorous and not academic and so we did everything we could to rename them, to refocus them in a way that wouldn't compete or diminish the value of getting a Chinese degree or taking Chinese language here on campus. So that is certainly an area of contention because the Chinese teachers who come certainly believe they are qualified, have good Chinese language teaching skills, should be able to teach on campus, we should be able to offer these courses. Yet there are battles that cannot be won if we allow that to happen.

The balance for Jane, and thus her negotiation within the liminal space, comes from this need to understand and not compete with or interfere with the academic mission of the university's Chinese language program, but still offer Chinese as a way to introduce students to language and culture. Jane has done this by limiting Chinese language classes offered on

campus to non-credit status and by concentrating her efforts on the K-12 realm. I particularly understood Jane's dilemma around this issue since at our university we have similar concerns, and have also concentrated our programs outside the university as a means to create feeder programs into our university, but not to be seen as competing with their mission.

7.2 NEGOTIATING THE LIMINAL STATE

Jane's understanding of China and Chinese society, and her long tenure within her university community are crucial to the way in which she organizes and manages the Confucius Institute. Much like Laura, Jane is concerned about the quality and mission of the Confucius Institute as being recognized and held to high standards. Much like Sun, Jane has another local university who also has a Confucius Institute but does not stand by the same kind of standards to which Jane holds her programs. This disconnect of "brand" (as Laura has noted) is a source of discomfort for Jane in that Jane brings academic and pedagogical expertise to the task and expects that of others that are within the Confucius Institute family to do so as well. Jane feels that the brand issue is due to a lack of the Chinese government's understanding of the diversity of American school systems, and a lack of standards that each Confucius Institute must follow:

And I think that that misunderstanding about those systems, and those requirements, is constantly a misstep. And I also feel that due to the fact that the United States education system is local, every different place is a different setup, different structure and some similar, but I don't think the Chinese anticipated how different they were or how hard it would be. I think they really thought it could be a McDonald's

situation, where it could come in and be one thing to everybody and everyone would love it just the same all over the country. And the idea of specializing it or tooling it to the local audience that came later and it wasn't something I think that they really understood.

Jane sees this as a cultural disconnect between the Chinese notion of volume (large numbers of Confucius Institutes and large numbers of students) as being a substitute for or more important than quality. Because Jane's program was one of the first 40 Confucius Institutes to be established in the global network, she and her program were both a part of the "growing pains" of Hanban's initial launching of the Confucius Institutes. Those early years, when processes and procedures were chaotic had an impact on the way in which Jane felt she could trust Hanban and the way in which she was to organize and maintain her programs. Jane felt this initial chaos was partially a matter of Hanban coming to terms with what their goals for the Confucius Institutes would ultimately become, along with general ambiguity and shift of governmental priorities which always puts the Confucius Institutes into the cross hairs between what the Institute director's belief is the needs for their Institutes, and what the Chinese government needs the Institutes to try and implement. For Jane, this back and forth is both a cultural disconnect and source of her perpetual liminal state as she triangulates between negotiating with Hanban, her own university, and her own goals for the Confucius Institute. She describes this tension in this way:

The word trust is an emotionally laden word, but the ambiguity of where you are, where the budget will be, what programs will be favored and what will not, constantly makes it difficult to plan. And if you are working in a K-12 world I think planning is

important. Because if you are creating a program where kids are progressing from kindergarten to twelfth grade you want to be able to say this is what we will do at this level, this is what we do this next level. And you can't anticipate the plan or any sort of drive from the Hanban in terms of how to develop sustainability of a program so you can't rely on them to do what you want them to do or what you hope they would do based on previous interactions. It changes. Frequently.

This lack of consistency also impacts the way in which Jane is able to trust what comes out of Hanban and how she is to negotiate on behalf of her program when there is so much uncertainty. Jane recognizes that there are forces within Hanban that she does not necessarily understand that impact the way in which programs are supported or not. But the back and forth and inconsistency adds to her own negotiation as part of her liminal space:

I think from the western point of view trust is about consistency. I think the human relationship is important and I think that is something that the Chinese and the U.S. side share. That we develop a relationship that we trust one another and that we share that trust for each other. But I feel that due to the whim of the Hanban sometimes that programs change or due to, um, circumstances that we really don't understand from our side, that funding may or may not come every year, the budget is evaluated every year in a way that may change. Like for example one year it was all about exhibitions, and all we have to do is get out there and do exhibitions, and how many exhibitions have we done this week and that kind of thing. And maybe we don't have the kind of cultural support or place for exhibitions, but who knows. And then they were all about

immersion education, but they didn't really know about immersion education, and now I think they do. They have been educated finally about what immersion education really means. But at the time it just meant teaching Chinese faster, or I don't know what it meant. But there were definitely misunderstandings from their side and from our side.

Of concern to Jane is the internal struggle within the university. Much like the other Sister directors, Jane has to constantly explain to other university authorities how China and the Chinese government work because, even while most of the pedagogical and philosophical path of the Confucius Institutes fall outside of the direct influence of Hanban, the procedures of Hanban (as noted above) do have impact. Jane is a well-respected member of the university administration at CMWU and she, like most of the other Sister directors, felt her reputation at her university and with her constituents often got compromised by the change of funding priorities or other procedural operations from Hanban that were out of her control from year to year:

I don't know if it effects my career except that I may look ineffective to my boss because I am not able to predict or plan or say with certainty what it is we may or may not be able to do. I may look ineffective to our constituents, to our stakeholders, because I say that we are going to do something and then we don't or we can't. Or we offer something once but we are unable to continue it because there is no more continued funding for it so if they like the program, great, but that is all it has and we are not able to offer it.

7.3 THE SIX SISTERS AND FRIENDSHIP

For Jane, the Six Sisters Consortium has been a source of both professional and personal enrichment. I asked Jane directly how the relationships she had with the consortium members differed from other relationships with other colleagues she has. She responded that while she has close relationships to other administrators, the particular structure of the Confucius Institutes, dealing with the Chinese government on a daily basis, and the depth of understanding she could rely upon from this group of women made the relationships particularly meaningful and important to her. As she notes,

I think of them as colleagues but I also think of them as friends. I know so much about their families, their children, their lives outside of the CI that I don't even know about my colleague next door here. You know, I don't consider them (my colleagues here) friends. They are lovely people, we get along with each other, we work together well. But I do consider the consortium people more like friends. And I think it is the similarities of our experience. It draws us together. I think we all learned Chinese about the same time. I think we have all spent time in China since the 1980's and, um, through that experience as young people there, and then as young adults and now as older adults, I think our constant has been our interaction with China. And um, I think that in that journey we have all mirrored each other. Not necessarily shared it but we definitely have had such life changing experiences from it. And really, who else can you tell about these things? I mean, I find that you could talk to someone else who has spent a great deal of time in India but that experience and this experience are completely different. And so I think that is part of it.

Unlike some of the other Sister directors, Jane is well established within her university in a way that she feels she is well respected and secure. Unlike Celia who feels she must continually have her finger on the pulse of the university and, indirectly, her state legislature, Jane felt that people within the university admired her abilities and turned to her for expertise. The challenge for Jane was centered between her own professionalism and Hanban. The dynamics of trust was more of an external construct between her Institute goals and those of Hanban.

I ask Jane what else about the consortium did she find was particular for this group and she said that not only did she trust the women of the consortium but she felt that there was a leveling in the power dynamic that she did not find in other situations within her work life. She mentioned that she often travelled with senior administrators, and as much as she gets along with them and enjoys travelling with them, there was still a power dynamic at play which impacted the way in which the relationships could evolve. But with the women of the consortium, Jane felt that there was a kind of equal amount of respect and support, that, despite our teasing one another about awards and honors, no one was in this consortium just for themselves. Jane distinguished the ability to turn to and depend upon this group as different from her other work relationships because as the leader of her program she feels she has a role to discern what needs to be shared and what does not. But having a forum for her to question or voice her concerns to others was valuable in her ability to negotiate her liminal state. As she notes,

Like I said they, you, are the first people I think of when something comes through the wire and I share it with everyone. Laura says, “Aren’t you a little news bug?” I just think, “Come on, at least I am not sharing the Trump stuff, because that

would be every hour.” But I think it is good to share things that you find, or what you know, or maybe some of you think you already know it? But I think it is important to keep each other abreast of what’s happening. I feel like, too, I think as a leader in your unit you have to continue to maintain a personality or profile that leads the unit despite what is going on. And that is not always conversation for the staff meeting or for the people on staff. Its conversation that someone might come to you and say, “I heard such and such,” and you think, “Yeah, I heard that too,” but the point is that I am not going to discuss the craziness that happens along with this journey with them because I think that sort of disruption is unnerving. And so it’s nice to have people that you have that mutual understanding with. So back to the friendship aspect of this I just think it is nice that as friends we can share things with each other what is going on we can’t share with others. I really hope the friendships continue, yes.

In the conclusions, I note the importance of this leveling of power structure as often being part of the sharing of a liminal state (Carson, 2016) and consider Jane’s conversation further as it relates to this phenomenon.

At the end of our conversation, when the tape recorders were turned off, Jane and I went to dinner at a local restaurant. During dinner Jane told me about her family and what was happening in the intersection between her life and China, and we were able to sort out some bits that for both of us we know we can only speak of to someone who understands the dilemma of this balance like one who is in it with you. The dilemma of children, husbands, career goals, and overall challenge of working in-between these competing forces is Jane’s permanent liminal space. For Jane, the personal and professional are more jammed together since her children are

young and her multiple roles compete for her physical and emotional attention. Much like Talley, Jane's sense of how and ability to negotiate between these competing forces is often bridged by the advice and counsel of the women of this consortium. Several of us have grown children and we all have had to negotiate these multiple and competing spaces. For Jane, the consortium is about support within all of these spaces, and helps to reassure her that she has a place where she can voice these concerns.

8.0 TALLEY

With each of the women of this consortium I have a deep appreciation for their expertise and wisdom. Yet of all the women in this study, I probably know Talley better than any other person. As a Confucius Classroom director, Talley and I have travelled in and out of Asia together twice a year for 10 years, and have struggled with missed flights, sick children, and long meetings on the other side of the world. Talley is a scholar of Chinese history and has helped to build our Confucius Institute and expand the mission and reach into areas of our state that would never have had access to Chinese language instruction. We are colleagues, friends, and staunch supporters of each other's work.

I can write a great deal about Talley from this personal and professional point of view because Talley came to me early in the process of developing the Confucius Institute at our university and asked if we could collaborate. At the time her college wanted to explore bringing a Confucius Institute to its campus. But Hanban saw that our university, which was only 50 miles away from her school, St. Benedictine College (SBC), was already applying. Rather than give up on the notion of a Confucius Institute, Talley approached me and asked if we could create a partnership. Because of this collaboration, we were able to create a Confucius Classroom which acts as a kind of satellite to our Confucius Institute, and through Talley's tenacity and hard work she was able to expand Chinese language into her rural area and bring some 11 schools into the consortium. Her ability to think out-of-the-box and willingness to work

to develop the program in this creative manner set the stage for our long, and meaningful professional relationship and friendship.

The interview I conducted in her office on the campus of the small Catholic college reflects the ease and familiarity we have with each other. Talley's particular struggles of the liminal space come from various competing forces in her life. She is a woman on a campus where the administration and most of the faculty are all male; she is a liberal at a conservative, Catholic school; she spends a great deal of time and energy with the Confucius Institute but has limited access to Hanban as a Confucius Classroom director rather than a Confucius Institute director; and she has a global perspective of the world but lives and works in a non-urban community. Her particular part of the state is very conservative which is sometimes reflected in comments made about her by students in their evaluations of her teaching each semester (she has admitted to being called a "femi-Nazi" by students, a particularly hurtful moniker to her), but feels she has a mission to educate these students to a broader understanding of China and through a lens that is not often reflected by the news organizations her students seem to patronize. Talley is a committed scholar, teacher, researcher, and administrator, but is often stuck both geographically and philosophically between issues and beliefs that are in constant conflict with how she sees herself in each of these roles.

I knew all of this well before our interview. I also credit discussions with Talley about our ambiguity of purpose, teaching and learning about China, and trying to balance all the priorities of our lives, as having brought me to consider many of the questions I am pursuing with this research. Talley, more than any other person, has been one of the central sounding boards for my ideas, considerations, questions, and ambitions, which is reflected in the honesty

and lack of filters to which she answers my questions, versus Jane's skepticism or Laura's caution.

8.1 NEGOTIATING MULTIPLE REALMS

I arrive at Talley's school and work my way to her office through the labyrinth of hallways and buildings that make up this beautiful, small college. The inside of the buildings look and feel like an old Catholic church. The school has a monastery and church building on campus, and it is not unusual to see both undergraduates and monks wandering the halls in unison. Talley and I settle in to the interview with small cups of Chinese tea resting between us. I ask her to describe her background for me, and what brought her to where she is today:

My role at Saint Benedictine College (SBC) is as a director of Chinese studies, so it's really hard to separate the CC (Confucius Classroom) directorship from being the director of Chinese studies, mainly because the CC and the Confucius Institute is integral to the study of Chinese at SBC. Um, but, with the CC for example, I guess the best thing that I do is help to build a Chinese language program here and a Chinese studies minor. As far as the events, we do an annual Chinese New Year program that has grown exponentially since we started the program 10 years ago, and we get close to 400 people from the community that come and learn about Chinese programs at SBC and learn about Chinese culture and Chinese language.

The role of Director of Chinese Studies is one that Talley enjoys and feels it is an essential role for the college. But it does not take long for Talley to immediately discuss the liminal state for her and to detail what the challenges to negotiating within these liminal spaces mean at a Catholic/religious school:

I would add that an additional layer of working in the margins is being part of a Catholic institution where I am neither Catholic nor male, and I am part of a patriarchal set up here. And so since I started here 10 years ago I have felt on the margins as I need to work in between the standard administrative structure. So strangely, I consider the work with the Chinese government and with the Catholic church in a very similar way because there is a lack of transparency in both regards and it is as if there is this you know, opaque power structure that I cannot break through or understand or influence really. If I am able to influence it is in ways that I don't see or understand.

8.2 COMPROMISE AND PURPOSE

I ask Talley to elaborate on what she means by an opaque power structure to which she feels she does not have much control over. She says that because her research is on women's issues in general, and issues regarding feminist concepts on women's health in particular, she is immediately, in what she refers to, as a "touchy" position. In the beginning Talley thought she would be able to change some of the structures within the college system and have an impact regarding women, and women's scholarship. But later, after some frustrating experiences, she

decided that she would focus on her own research and advance her personal cause, rather than try and change the structure that existed at the school.

I have several issues. I mean, the highest, a lot of the people who make decisions here are all men. I am not a man. They are all Catholic; I'm not Catholic. They are all relatively conservative, politically, I am not that. I came to the realization after many years of working here that of course they are not going to embrace me with open arms. What was I thinking? Why would I think that they would say, "Of course, come. Let's work together"? Of course they aren't going to do that. So now I just do what I want. I continue to work in the way I want to without that expectation. Or without that validation from them. I did care. I almost quit. I came so close to quitting.

This was a long road for Talley, and one that took some compromises regarding how she wanted to progress professionally in and outside of the college. She came to terms with that ambiguity by focusing on expanding her research field (combining her Ph.D. in history with a master's degree in public health), and developing courses for students to challenge their understanding of China. It was not that she gave up in what she believed in so much as she found a way to compromise one aspect of her life to make other aspects of her life function. For Talley, leaving the college was not an option for personal reasons, but also because she decided she could have an impact, despite making some professional considerations that were not perfect for her. This notion of compromise was something many of the women of this study mention, most of them saying they make decisions that impact their professional careers because of

familial obligations and/or the realization that they feel they cannot enact meaningful change on the university structure.

For Talley, perhaps because or despite these challenges, the Six Sisters became an essential outlet for her frustrations and a system of support for her. Because Talley runs a Confucius Classroom rather than a Confucius Institute, her issues with Hanban are not the same as for the other directors. However, Talley is a key piece of the overall success of the Confucius Institute network and has acted in a de facto vice-director role since the beginning of the Confucius Institute formation. Her knowledge of the processes of the Confucius Institute are considerable as is her understanding of how Chinese systems of bureaucracy function. Talley's relationship then to both the Confucius Institute and the Six Sisters help her to develop both professionally and personally and help her to redefine her work at many levels. She sees the advantages to being a member of the Six Sisters in this manner:

Having strength in numbers, trying to get things done. Rather than it just being me, a lone voice trying to advocate for what we need or something, funding or a new initiative or whatever, we could draw on the strength of the other Sisters, Six Sisters, and work together. Yeah. I think it has been great. And an example of that is the Jewish refugee center exhibit. Right? So it traveled around. I couldn't do that by myself. You couldn't do that by yourself. So getting everyone, using people's strengths, people have a lot of different strengths. I'm thinking in particular PWCU's strength, and their knowledge of art. Then having everyone work together to create this travelling exhibit. It's been great.

8.3 ISOLATION

For Talley one of the key frustrations of her multiple roles and negotiations within the liminal space is the feeling of isolation that comes with juggling all these roles. For Talley, with few people on her campus who understand China, she is the lone China scholar. Talley, much like Jane, also has a young family and a husband whose career has specific demands that make compromises necessary to keep all the pieces in place. Talley concedes that she has a great deal of latitude in her life and is able to travel to do her research, run the Confucius Classroom, write grants, and even pursue other degrees, but this constant negotiation comes at a price. Often she takes her twin children with her to China or elsewhere, partially so they have the international exposure and partially because sometimes it is the only way she can accomplish what she wants to do. Travelling with twins to Asia requires sitters or parents who will help with childcare, and a set of contingency plans. This constant negotiation of self with ambition is similar to Sun's identity struggle. However, unlike Sun whose compromises and struggles are situated in her cultural and ethnic identity, Talley's negotiation within the liminal space is situated between who and where she is in reality with who and what she wants to be as a scholar. The result of this negotiation for Talley is a kind of disconnect that leads to feelings of isolation which the Six Sister consortium helps her to resolve. With the Six Sisters she says,

I don't feel isolated. I feel isolated if I just take my work here, aside from just my work here I do kind of feel isolated. But I don't feel lonely. Partly because I know I have people who understand what I do, like you. Yeah, and whereas I might be isolated in this community, in my head I am not. So the community [with the Six Sisters] is really important. I think if I didn't have this I would have left. I do. I do. Because I wouldn't

know where to go, you know? If you don't have anyone who can relate to your experience it's very isolating.

For Talley the isolation is also why she works so hard in other aspects of her professional life. Instead of seeking validation through colleagues at her college, she advances her scholarship in ways that enrich her personally. While this path allows for her to publish and do research and give her access to grants and opportunities, feelings of disconnect persists for Talley and are part of her overall continuing negotiation of self with her greater sense of purpose.

8.4 TRUST AND THE CONSORTIUM

Trust for Talley is an important aspect of how she is able to work with the Six Sisters. Not just in having a sounding board for advice, but also in what she experiences as a kind of coalition of unspoken support. When I ask Talley to elaborate on her feelings about the consortium she frames her relationship to the other women as being particular to this set of people:

I am on this board of a regional AAS (Association for Asian Studies). Um, the difference I think is that this group is chosen, very selective. The other ones you're just part of something, though none of them are randomly selected, um, they are more diverse. So it's like the saying about your family, you can't choose your family, but you get to choose your friends, luckily. This consortium is more selected. It has a more refined selection criteria (laughs). Right? Also they are self-selected. They are self-

selected in that people join or they don't. The other groups that I am a part of you are appointed or elected.

When I asked her to tell me more Talley framed the idea of trust in terms of the differences between trust in the U.S. among people and trust in Chinese society:

I think [trust] is really amorphous in Chinese society. It is a concept that is really a difficult thing. Because I've noticed that among Americans, American friends we are really loose lipped, right? I mean we talk about all kinds of stuff. We talk about other people, we talk about all kinds of stuff about people and they do not do that in China. They do not talk about other people. They play things very close to their chest. Even when you have the most amazing friendship, like I have with Zhou Ying, who is a very close friend of mine, but very closed. Her emotions, and her ideas about other people are played very close to the chest. And so it's hard to get a sense of trust I think, in China. It's hard to achieve it. Because you just don't know the background or the motives. It is a much more serious thing. And it's something that has to be earned and cultivated. Maintained too.

Talley continues to speak about how in China the notion of friendships and trust plays out in different ways and that the relationship is weighty and reserved only for very close relationships. There is also a concept of "for life," meaning a Chinese friendship has expectations and considerations that an American friend might not. Talley spoke about how her one Chinese friend, if she had a son or daughter that wanted to study in the U.S. and needed a

long-term place to stay, it would be understood that this child would naturally live with Talley, perhaps even for years. She says, “It’s why I only have a handful of Chinese friends because the obligation is so great. For your U.S. friends, not so much. It’s all weighted differently.”

Which brought us back to the consortium relationships. I asked Talley why these particular women meant so much to her and she told a story about a friend of hers in the Midwest who had a similar experience of feeling isolated and frustrated with her academic job. In order to cope, the woman finally left and struck out on her own as an independent scholar. To Talley, there was a great deal of admiration that this woman could do this since affiliation with a college or university is the backbone of academic credibility. But to Talley, it was the woman’s lack of community that caused the split. As Talley elaborated:

She was representing something that was so foreign, she was trying to show that other countries had value and worth. And it was killing her. She didn’t have the support of the other faculty. The other faculty never left the state either. Very provincial. Very narrow minded, very provincial. And she finally quit. She quit a tenured job. And in this small academic circle, our field, we say when others quit, she pulled an Everett (her name was Everett). We say she pulled an Everett and quit. We say to one another, “you should pull an Everett, just quit and go out on your own.” And I think had she had some kind of support, like this, like this consortium, she wouldn’t have felt that way. She would have never quit.

For Talley, the community created by the Six Sisters became the thing that allowed her to stay and gave her a set of people that eased the isolation, even though she was proximally distant

from all the other Confucius Institute members. Talley credits the Six Sisters for giving her the space to stay, and for helping her to negotiate the ambivalence of her role within the university and her other personal roles and responsibilities. A sense of belonging, to both the group and something larger than herself, helped Talley negotiate her isolation and gave her the fortitude to come to peace with her career.

9.0 MICHELE

As I engaged with my participants in this exercise and spent time with them trying to construct and understand their position within these narratives, I came back to my own intersections within the liminal space between career, personal life, and various competing forces. I began this dissertation with the idea that as a group we came together through our shared similar experiences and built relationships in order to negotiate the liminal spaces in our lives. But as I engaged more deeply into the narratives I realized each of our approaches to negotiating the liminal space was as different as we were as individuals, yet also had similarities.

9.1 CULTURAL COMMUNITY

An example of my own negotiation with the liminal space is having lived in this particular northeastern U.S. city for the last 25 years. Oddly, I consider myself culturally southern, since I lived in the south through most of my young life. In one of my graduate programs I created a final project on the concept of cultural communities, and how certain symbolism and rituals that are native to a place define those who are “in” from those who are “out.” In the case of our city, an active football culture tied directly to an industrial past and a deep-seated sense of pride from locals regarding the resiliency of the city and its citizens to remake itself for the 21st century, are all part of the local lore of being from *here*. In the class project, I used a mock-up of a person

wearing iconic native garb (local football jersey, skirt from the hometown baseball team), along with other specific items from a world-famous artist, a nationally beloved children's television personality, and dinosaur images as a nod to the city's place as a global player in archeology, and asked people of the class to react to a phrase attached to the display that said, "Are you a *yinzer*?" I purposely chose this vernacular term because I know that the term *yinzer* (an iteration of the word *yinz*, meaning "you all") is somewhat controversial in this town. Our class was made up of people who had grown up in the area, and a number of foreign-born individuals. The locals had a mixed reaction to being asked to place a Post-It yes or no next to the imagery that they recognized, and the foreign-born had limited idea what anything on my display symbolized or meant. The locals reacted particularly strongly (some positive and some negative) to the use of the term *yinzer*, in that, in the past, this term had often been used to imply a lack of education, or social status. However, much as the city has reinvented itself, the term has started to move into a place of prominence and is slowly being co-opted (by media and marketing wonks) to imply civic pride.

I use this class experiment as an example because feelings of marginalization, displacement, isolation, or misunderstanding, for myself and others, can often be tied to these experiences of not being "of" or "from." Thus my own curiosity and consideration of liminality is often tied directly to this kind of internal and external dialogue of self with community, or self with community of purpose and to belonging.

Working in the Confucius Institute for the past 10 years has certainly been a part of the process of how to negotiate between my position within the greater university and with Hanban, between a Chinese partner university, and other small colleges in our consortium, between United States federal rules and Chinese governmental policies, and between my personal and

professional life. Yet, as daunting as those competing forces might seem, through the course of this research I came to realize one significant aspect of my own process regarding working through these liminal spaces. When I am in the United States, I often feel as if I am an outside observer, but in China, I am always a foreigner. Much like Sun's negotiation with herself as Chinese and as being seen as Chinese in China, my realization is that because I am not Chinese, I am always viewed, and thus treated, as a foreigner in China. During my interview with Celia I said, "I think the thing about working in China for me is I am comfortable being in Asia and comfortable being foreign in Asia. At least in China I am not supposed to *get it*. Whereas when I am in the United States, because I am from the U.S., I am supposed to understand everything and sometimes I just do not understand" (Field note, June 12, 2017). Celia related to this experience having shared the same kind of background as myself as the child of an expat and her feelings of being "third culture." Being in a liminal space within Asia, for Celia and for myself, are more natural to both of us than feeling that way in what is supposed to be our own country.

I believe my own personal success with the Confucius Institute has been because I am comfortable working from this place of ambiguity and uncertainty. Because China and Chinese culture is not mine, and because I have spent years of my life trying to consider this other way of looking at the world, I have naturally entered this liminal existence through my work and interests. Working in China, much as Talley, Celia, and Sun have explained, there is a natural obtuseness to contracts and processes which we are not supposed to fully understand. My ability to be comfortable with that ambiguity is what makes the situation with Hanban, and the various competing stakeholders, makes the process workable. In this way, my own struggle with this constant space of being in-between can also be an advantage and a disadvantage.

9.2 COMMUNITY OF PURPOSE

My own engagement with the Confucius Institute is one of constant negotiation and renegotiation of self with purpose. I believe in the stated mission of the Confucius Institute (to be a cultural bridge between foreign nations and China), but not always in the prescribed delivery. I believe in the necessity of the engagement with China, but not always the pathway. I wrote about liminal spaces and feelings of ambiguity and the way these women helped me to define that space as a way of telling my own story of negotiating the spaces in-between. But I also have written about liminal spaces as a way to think about my own career and how I constantly must consider what I know to be true with what perception can be.

An example of this was a couple of years ago when the Vice Premier of China decided to come to our university for a formal visit. Through my colleagues in China I was told that her primary interest was in touring our Confucius Institute and interacting with students who have been taking Mandarin. Through Hanban I was told that we were to do a large performance, have a demonstration class, and decorate our offices with storyboards that emphasized the highlights of our years as a Confucius Institute. The issue was that there was a disconnection between what the university thought should be the priority of the visit (highlighting our medical school accomplishments) and what Hanban said to me was the focus of her visit. Obviously with a visit of this caliber there were many delegations of people from the Chinese consulate, from Hanban, and from other offices in the university engaged to oversee and create the proper agenda.

In the end, it was our visitor who decided the agenda, and it was our job to accommodate those requests but the process was done in a manner that was typical of how Chinese delegates negotiate (exerting pressure at both the highest level, i.e. Chancellor's office, to low level, i.e. me and my staff at the Confucius Institute) and exert influence at multiple pressure points to get the

agenda they deemed relevant. In this instance the Chinese government used communication via me and my office to convey the real agenda, but I had a difficult time convincing others higher up at the university that what I was hearing was the real purpose. The reason the Chinese government came to me first was based on the concept of “face.” I was their point person and they could tell me the real agenda without having to interact directly with senior university officials at our university with whom they did not want to offend (by perhaps turning down the invitation to the medical school). It was finally resolved when a team from the Chinese consulate met a team from our university and laid out various aspects of their plan, most of which centered on the large accompanying press corps that would come with the Vice Premier (12 members of the Chinese press), 19 ministers from the Chinese Central government, and an entire other group of high level officials of Hanban. As Laura would say, the purpose of the visit was to be China “on stage,” not China “off stage.” This was to be a feel-good visit where the Vice Premier would visit a city that was on the radar internationally for its transformation from industrial past to modern tech hub, stop by the award-winning Confucius Institute to be met by students taking Mandarin, and yes (agreed to finally), to visit the university medical school to see brain surgery breakthroughs as well. There were compromises and much back and forth but through this experience the concept of living in and negotiating within the liminal space was real and challenging for me. I knew the real purpose of the visit (China “on stage”) because I had a long and trusting relationship with my colleagues in China and they were depending on our relationship for me to push the agenda up the pipeline. But the fact that I hold no real position of significant authority within my university was a disadvantage. The university could not understand why the Chinese government would come to me when I was not in a position to make any decisions (a logical conclusion). But the truth remained that my colleagues in China trusted

me and saw me as the person who could act in good faith on their behalf. In this way my Chinese colleagues believed I understood them, how they “got things done,” and could be depended upon to act in good faith without them risking offending anyone higher up in our university system.

My frustration, stress, and inability to have others understand what I knew to be true created a great deal of tension and disconnect and was one of the more difficult experiences of my career. The program went off well, with 80 children singing in a concert hall, an impressive mingling of delegates from both our university and China, and many photo opportunities. But the constant back and forth highlighted for me the challenges of the career, and how working from in-between could be difficult and stressful.

For me, the challenge has always been about being respected and considered an expert while negotiating in an environment in which my opinion is not always understood, or seen sometimes as suspect because of my relationship to Hanban. Part of this is because of the challenges of running the Confucius Institute that I and other members of the consortium have spoken of in this research, and some is just a part of a misunderstanding in general regarding how China functions inside and outside their own administrative/cultural boundaries. Being the broker of those boundaries for me adds to my sense of frustration regarding how to manage within the liminal space. Much as Talley said, there were many times I thought I should leave because my work was not appreciated, but I stayed because of my belief in the greater purpose and the personal appreciation of how the work is meaningful and has impact.

Turner (1969) calls the bond that individuals form in the liminal space *communitas*, or bonds that transcend the sharing of the liminal experience (p. 103) and I certainly feel this sense of community with the women of the Six Sisters. The women were an excellent sounding board

and source of compassion when I turned to them for advice during that particular episode. My own negotiation in the liminal space and my approach to this research has been grounded in the belief that my own frustrations, concerns, and feelings of permanent liminality were things that many women feel in the workforce. But my specific negotiations also stemmed from my nomadic childhood and my interest in experiences within symbolic and theoretical thresholds. My relationship to the women of this study has been very meaningful to me since I feel I have found my *communitas*, or a group of people who understand the same experience and related to the concepts of marginalization, ambiguity, and opaqueness. Much like Celia, Talley, and Sun agree that the group helped them to feel less isolated, the Six Sisters became a sounding board and system of support unlike any I had previously experienced before in my work life. Though we often do not see each other we are often connected via social media (WeChat or group text messages) usually to quickly sort out various Hanban policies, but also just to check in (birthdays, holidays, tracking each other vacations). In this way we are as much a consortium as Carson (2016) calls a “virtual tribe” (p. 27). I have come to depend upon these women as friends, mentors, colleagues, and tribal members in that I often turn to one, several, or all of them often, even several times in a given week. And from this study I have come to realize that they depend upon me and my expertise in much the same way. In this way, I believe the consortium acts as a validating mechanism for me and is a place where my opinions are respected and considered valuable. For me, the Six Sisters acknowledge my voice, respect my thoughts, and challenge my beliefs while supporting my endeavors. The Six Sisters help me negotiate the liminal space by sharing that space and acknowledging the challenges and advantages with it.

10.0 RESEARCH SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

In the following final chapter, I synthesize these experiences and the narrative discourse of my participants and myself and consider the various themes that arose while negotiating in the liminal space.

10.1 INTRODUCTION: ZEN AND THE ART OF ARCHERY

In the book *Zen and the Art of Archery* (1953), the author Eugen Herrigel, a German philosopher, visits Japan to study under a Zen master to learn the fundamental principles of *kyudo*, a form of Japanese archery. What Herrigel comes to realize is that the art in *kyudo* does not reside in the arrow hitting the target, or in the strength and sureness of the shot. What Herrigel learns is how the small physical movements leading up to the pulling of the bow, and the releasing of his internal notion regarding what archery must look like, is where the true mastery resides. Only when he is able to shift away from his internal prescribed conscript of what he believes *kyudo* is to be is he able to understand archery. What Herrigel comes to realize is that the real purpose of *kyudo* lies in the arc and the flight path of the arrow rather than in where that arrow ultimately lands.

Much like Herrigel's journey of enlightenment through archery, this research shifts away from the prescribed way in which I understand women's lives and reframes the dialogue to

consider the variant and conflicting tensions that the women of this study use to negotiate in-between. I see my participants as the archers, and the target as those elements in their lives, their work, families, and other considerations, which they must manage and negotiate. This discussion is as much about the women's process of working through and resetting their "bow" over and over again, as it is about their work, the definition of competing forces, and the spaces and paths in-between. By concentrating on the liminal space, the arc of the arrow so to speak, rather than just the person or the target, the intention of this research is to shift away from the tangible elements that impacts the other side of their lives, to refocus the dialogue on the path that for many women is often left underappreciated and undefined.

10.2 INTERSECTIONS WITHIN THE LIMINAL SPACE

In order to understand the significance of liminality as experienced by the women of this study it is necessary for me to further refine the various and competing forces which place the women in these positions. For the women of the Six Sister Consortium there are three distinct spheres which define, inform, and impact the way in which they experience the conditions of their liminal state. I define these intersections as: Roles, Selves, and Structures (Figure 1).

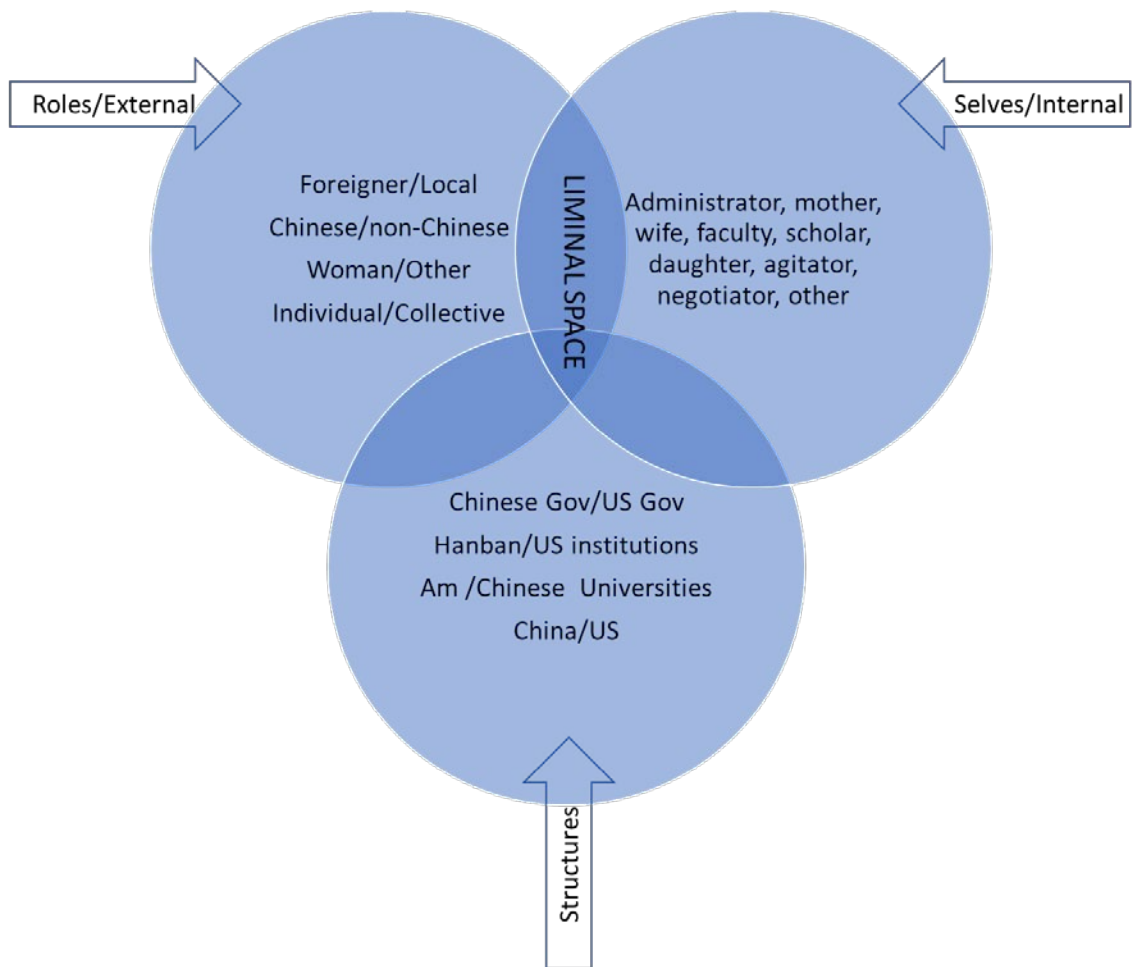


Figure 1. *Intersections Shaping the Liminal Space for the Six Sisters*

In the category of Roles, I define the roles each woman play as foreigner verses local, Chinese verses non-Chinese, woman verses other, and individual verses collective, as the main ways in which the roles as expressed by outside forces define and influence the way in which they are able to function in their jobs. The concept of Roles delineates the more public aspect, or the *etic* perspective, of their intersection between themselves and the outside world.

Selves, as I define them here, is the woman's personal or private negotiations between her various concepts of who she is at any given moment as significant in the way in which she

experiences the liminal state. These Selves are the *emic*, or internal consideration of how the woman sees herself, and include administrator, wife, mother, scholar, educator, daughter, agitator, negotiator, diplomat, and faculty. This more personal version of how each woman saw herself in relation to her work and family lives was significant in that each woman expressed these various and competing elements as having impact on her ability to manage or succeed. At any point within the space where the women were balancing their lives within systems, any or all of these Selves might be brought into the equation.

The third space I call Structures, or the systems within which each woman had to maneuver in order to run her personal and professional lives. Structures were the outside forces which for each woman was an ongoing part of the negotiation between her public and private spaces or spheres. Within Structures I identify the Chinese government verses U.S. government, Hanban verses U.S. institutions, American verses Chinese universities, and the U.S. verses China (both as a cultural construct and a structural entity). Within each of these spaces the concept of negotiation and consideration of task and purpose placed each woman in a position of continually having to negotiate between conflicting, and often times incompatible, entities. How they negotiated those spaces and the significance of others within the Consortium in helping them do so became clear through this research.

10.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIPS

As I was considering the conclusion for this dissertation I began rethinking why it was that I started this study. Why do I believe this research is important? Then I came across this quote from bell hooks (2015):

Since masses of young females know little about feminism and many falsely assume that sexism is no longer the problem, feminist education for critical consciousness must be continuous. Older feminist thinkers cannot assume that young females will just acquire knowledge of feminism along the way to adulthood. They require guidance. Overall women in our society are forgetting the value and power of sisterhood. Renewed feminist movements must once again raise the banner high to proclaim anew “Sisterhood is powerful” (p. 17).

The central goal of this research is to consider how the negotiation of a state of liminality plays out for the Six Sisters of the Confucius Institute, which is emblematic of how some women negotiate living between conflicting messages, demands, and concerns in their personal and professional lives. Initially I entered this research to consider the ways in which women learned from other women peers as a means to understanding how women become leaders in the workplace. After several attempts to ask my interviewees about leadership, it occurred to me that this was not the story each of them wanted to tell regarding how they saw themselves in relation to the Confucius Institute directorship, or in their relationships to other women in the Six Sisters Consortium.

What this research has shown is that the Consortium formed and flourished, not because of our shared frustrations and concerns over how to manage a Confucius Institute, but actually as a constructive response to our state of perpetual frustration. Our shared beliefs of sisterhood, of community of purpose, of integrity, and our ability to put the needs of the group above our personal needs also came into play. What became obvious as I heard each woman’s narrative

was how the situations each person had to negotiate was vastly different and had remarkably varied impetus, strengths, and weaknesses. But what seemed to draw these women together as a collective was a shared sense of purpose based on what each considered to be high standards and adherence to ethical and moral practices. Much like Laura's notion of the control over "branding" and Talley's consideration of "ethical practice," the women formed a union based on an understanding that each felt the other had the same consistently high standards and wanted what was best, not just for themselves, but for the entire Confucius Institute global programs.

This sisterhood, as hooks (2015) describes, helps the women of this Consortium to reaffirm the power of the collective and the power to enact change, whether or not theirs is the most dominant voice in the room. This sisterhood ties into the concept of *communitas*, or the shared communities built and sustained by the Six Sisters while negotiating in the liminal space.

10.4 COMMUNITAS

According to Carson (2016), "a special camaraderie develops among those sharing liminal passages" (p. 4). Carson uses Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas*, or the result when those who come together while negotiating in the liminal space often form a special bond. This bond, according to Carson (2016), "transcends any socially established differentiations. Those who share the liminal passage develop a community of the in-between. This creates a community of anti-structure whose bond continues even after the liminal period is concluded. A significant sharing of the liminal passage creates strong egalitarian ties which level out differences in status and station which have been established by structure" (p. 4). This leveling of differences is something that Jane noted in her interview, and Laura mentioned regarding how she felt

everyone entered the Consortium with the same set of values. What is clear from this research is that for the members of the Six Sisters there is a bond that ties them to one another and supersedes other relationships that they have had with other colleagues within their working lives. Laura, Talley, and Jane all recognized this sisterhood community as being specific to the experience of these women working in the Confucius Institute program. Sun goes further to say that she only considers certain information about the Confucius Institutes to be reliable if it is validated by the group.

While Turner's interpretation of *communitas* is intended to mean those who experience liminality as part of a transitional stage, I believe the notion of *communitas* is relevant to the Consortium members in their permanent state of liminality and acts as a leveling force that minimizes differences. As hooks (2015) notes, "by emphasizing an ethics of mutuality and interdependency feminist thinking offers us a way to end domination while simultaneously changing the impact of inequality" (p. 117). For the women of the Consortium working within this community reinforces their ability to create change, reaffirms their positions, adds resiliency, gives them leverage within their home institutions and with Hanban, and strengthens their own positions. The positive outcomes gained from inclusion in the Consortium helps the members overcome obstacles, redefine priorities, and gives them insight to solutions in ways they would not had otherwise had. In a sense, I argue, the sense of *communitas* allows the members of the Consortium to crowd source their problems with one another to come up with viable solutions to dilemmas or creative ways to reimagine their personal and professional selves.

10.5 UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE FOR THIS INTERPRETATION

Within an educational setting, a dialogical approach to understanding narrative materials can be used to understand the minds of individuals, teachers, students, and administrators, who are involved in educational settings that affect the intimacies of their personal selves (Hermans, 2013, p. 81). In many ways, dialogical interpretation in research uses dialogue as a metaphor for understanding various phenomena including communicative structures such as internal dialogues, self-talk, production of knowledge, and relationships between groups within a greater society (p. 84). In particular, the self-society bridge, much like the use of metaphors, can act as an extension of the self to the local and global environment, because the notion of dialogue acts as the basic link between self and society (p. 84).

By acknowledging my own participation within the dynamic I move the social dimension of the narrative inquiry from stories *about* to stories *with* my participants. As Morris (2002) explains, “the concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as of allowing narrative to work on us” (p. 196). It means that as much as my interviews were about my participant’s point of view, by interviewing these women our narratives became more intertwined, and the notion of who we were as individuals and as a collective became more focused. In this way this narrative study extends the idea and value of understanding nuances within dialogue as both a co-constructive and fluid process which then impacts my own role as researcher and the meaning making my colleagues brought to the process.

Through the interviews, it became clear to me that the central issue to this particular group was how each person had her own struggles and achievements, and how the support from the other members of the group *impacted* the way they managed and viewed those liminal experiences. While I still believe there is great value in understanding how and why women learn from other women in terms of leadership development, this study emphasized the *value* and *significance* this group of women place on their peer-to-peer relationships to the other women of this study, rather than how each learned about leadership from the others. Using a coherence theory of truth claims, I am able to examine how the Six Sisters Consortium within the Confucius Institute network acted as a catalyst toward these women's understandings of their own process and how trust and trusting one another was central to that understanding. According to Fraser and McDougall (2017), "the goal of narrative feminist research is *not* to find universally generalizable themes and understandings of experience but to offer insight, glimpses into others' worlds and ways of seeing the world" (p. 249).

This iterative approach allowed me to employ a fluid course as I considered the narratives, interpreted the interviews, and reconsidered what the women told me was important to each of them, while not imposing a false narrative on them regarding something I thought was significant but may not have been to each of them. Also, by listening and hearing my participants describe their experiences *in situ* I gained insight into who they saw themselves to be in relation to the greater Confucius Institute network, and further understood the how they valued this network of women. For example, Laura's use of metaphors regarding "China onstage" and "China offstage," was an example of how we all negotiate between the public aspect of working with Hanban (onstage) and our own more mundane methods that we use in one-on-one meetings (offstage) with our Chinese colleagues. Laura's use of this metaphor allowed me to understand

how she considered her role in relation to everything she saw and experienced, and what she considered to be authentic or not, which was specific to her experiences as a theater person and a scholar of Chinese opera.

10.6 EMERGENT THEMES

Through the process of contemplating the narratives of my participants and my own reflexive process of both their words and my thoughts, several important themes and considerations emerged.

10.6.1 IMPACT OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN HANBAN

Of importance to this study and something I believe was influential for the Six Sisters, is that within the hierarchical structure of Hanban (until quite recently) the most significant leaders have been women. The head of the entire Confucius Institute program globally from its inception until December of 2016 was run by Madam Xu Lin, a formidable, charismatic, and somewhat controversial leader, and Madam Xu Lin's boss, the head of the entire Hanban world network, was the Vice Premier of China, Madam Liu Yandong. As I considered my interviews and the amount of support and respect the Six Sisters received from Hanban it seems impossible to ignore the impact that having female leaders from the Chinese central government had on conferring legitimacy on our own group from outside forces. I mention this primarily because it was Madam Xu who named our group the "Six Sisters" (*liu jiemei*), gave her blessing to our

projects, and held us out at annual meetings as being “models” of how cooperation and collaboration could be developed to support the global mission of the Confucius Institutes.

Having female leaders in China, and being female ourselves was, in this case, a benefit to our Consortium and helped us to build projects that advanced the mission of the Confucius Institutes for the greater good. But the fact that the leadership of Hanban and the person who had oversight of Hanban were both female was more of an exception than the rule. All of the most senior powerful positions in the Chinese government Standing Committee are male, as are most of the ministers at the provincial level. I believe that Madame Xu Lin promoted our group specifically because we were women as a means to elevate both her exceptionalism as the singular female leader and because we advanced her cause in a positive way. As I have learned from this research, exceptional women in positions of power are usually there despite, not (as can be the case in patriarchal societies such as China) because they are female.

10.6.2 ISOLATION

One emergent theme that came about through this research was the concept of isolation or loneliness. From my field notes I theorized that perhaps the notion of isolation was related to the kind of communities in which my participants lived (rural, or red states) but upon further examination I began to see that there was more to it than mere proximal distance. The isolation was due in part to working on a project that had few colleagues who understood the day-to-day work, and was an offshoot of other aspects of being in the liminal state between two worlds (China/US; female in a male dominated environment, etc.). This dissonance between the reality of the Six Sisters work life and others who worked at their universities added to their feelings of ambiguity and isolation. For example, Laura made it clear that she had excellent working

relationships with many people in her department, and even travelled with others, but never felt she had the same kind or depth of relationship she had with the other members of the Six Sisters. To Laura, a subtle feeling of isolation from others in her department was due to the nature of the work and the energy it would have taken to explain the nuances of engaging with the Chinese government (the frustrations and cultural implications of interactions with Hanban) to those other colleagues. But with the other Consortium members Laura did not have to contextualize her daily interactions because this group of women all understood what she was managing.

Understanding isolation as part of the liminal space created by this cognitive and spatial disconnect helped me to realize the importance of the glue factor of these women's relationships to each other. Within the Consortium each woman found a like-minded colleague, social bonding, validation, belongingness, and collegiality with others. Social media helped to ease this isolation as well since the group has its own WeChat group, group text, and internal email streams. These social media contacts are immediate and often daily, especially when there are problems (external and internal) which need to be addressed in a timely manner. The constant access, availability, peer clarification, and reinforcement by someone each person trusted in times of need was cited by each of the participants as an important aspect of why they valued the other women in the Consortium.

10.6.3 MARGINALIZATION

As I mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, permanent liminality is as much about negotiating with external forces (roles, structures, selves) as internal. Liminality is different from being marginalized in that permanent liminality may or may not involve marginalization (as for

monks). However, for the member the Six Sisters feelings of being marginalized, or placed on the periphery, were a part of negotiating the liminal space for each of them.

From my field notes I say, “The political hot potato which is Hanban and China’s self-proclaimed recognition of the Confucius Institutes as a direct product for their “soft” power globally gives fuel to the anxieties for U.S. and Canadian scholars” (Field Note, June 18, 2017). This note reflects my own concerns regarding how the media often portrays China and how the Confucius Institutes are sometimes seen as an arm of the Chinese government’s path toward “global authority.” Celia says the Confucius Institute is viewed as a problem just by being a Chinese entity, and the negative press has not helped, but that the trust/mistrust toward *China* then is manifested in others in her university not trusting *her*. Talley says the same thing but that it comes from a different place: that the role of American exceptionalism as prescribed by those at her college and on the campus itself, means anyone who is not on that agenda is the “other.” For Talley, the U.S.-centric nature of the school and a stepping away from the concept of globalization, has a direct impact on how her colleagues view her research and her role within the Confucius Institute.

For Jane and Laura, marginalization came from an inability to externally control the brand, and therefore the “bad actors” that existed at some other institutes created a negative influence on their own institutes. For Jane it was because someone else within her state operated their Confucius Institute in a manner that did not adhere to the same standards of pedagogy and practice that she created for her programs. For Laura the national brand being somewhat “suspect” created marginalization that she overcame by aligning herself with well-known scholars so that her Institute’s reputation was tied to these well-respected entities.

For me, I was recently on a business trip in New York where several people I met asked

how I resolved certain aspects of my job with the goals of the Chinese government. I was particularly surprised given that the mission I was on that week had nothing to do with my work for Hanban. Yet I realize that often when people in the United States are dealing with me, they think they are also dealing with the Chinese government because of my affiliation with the Confucius Institute.

This notion that all of us “work for Hanban” is one of the largest sources of external misinterpretation and marginalization for the Six Sister directors. Each of us works for our home university. Our jobs are to interact and negotiate with Hanban on behalf of our schools but often times we are thought of by other colleagues, the press, or other outside entities as pushing only the mission of the Chinese government. For the women of this Consortium this form of marginalization discounts our years as China scholars and the fact that many of us work on a wide range of projects in China that benefit our home universities. This kind of reaction also puts us in a defensive posture despite the fact that many of us believe the work we do with the Confucius Institute is a worthy and important undertaking that benefits both the U.S. and China. For many women in the Consortium being put in a defensive position regarding our work discounts our own agency in determining where the line is drawn between our loyalties and interests.

When I ask my participants how they deal with being marginalized each of them had a different response. For Talley and Celia, each said they were initially angry, and then they let it go. For Laura, Jane, and Sun each reinvented another aspect of the job that showed specific benefit to their home institution so that this kind of talk did not seem relevant. For all the women in the Consortium having a platform with others to discuss this kind of marginalization was a key part of the value of the Six Sisters and a key component in negotiating their own struggle within

the liminal space.

10.7 THE POWER OF THE FEMINIST COLLECTIVE

In this study, I resist stereotypes and notions that women are “naturally” more collaborative and it is their “nurturing” tendencies that make these kinds of consortia workable. From this research I have found that because the dominant narrative and dominant structures in which these women work has been and continues to be predominately male, these women feel they are often not “heard” as individuals. Despite the female senior leadership of Hanban, systematic patriarchal structures in the Chinese government, and persistent inequalities within our home universities, do impact the role women play in the Confucius Institute network. As I mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, out of 110 Confucius Institutes in the United States, there are only 35 female directors. Arguing that women are somehow more inclined to collaboration and collectives ignores the fact that, for some women, the only voice they have against a process that naturally ignores what they have to say is through the feminist or sororal collective.

Gilligan (1997) and Belenky (et al., 1997) have mentioned in their research, that trust and solidifying goals as a collective is a crucial part of this process, and is often a source of power for women. For the women of this Consortium their stories reflect the power many of them felt as part of the collective and that the collective voice gave them more leveraging authority both at home within their universities and with the Chinese government. As some feminist scholars have argued (Allen, 2014; Miller, 1992) I believe that power as domination is a somewhat masculine concept, and would, as this research has revealed, consider shared power as an opportunity for power to be recast as a catalyst for change (Miller, 1992, p. 241). As Miller (1992) notes, “there

is enormous validity in women's not wanting to use power as it is presently conceived and used. Rather, women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others" (p. 247–248).

Certainly for the women of this Consortium, the ability to have power with rather than over one another played out in their interest in supporting each member of the Consortium for the greater good and as this catalyst for change. By forming this collective the women each felt they had a stronger platform for engagement, an ability to enhance the overall brand and standards, and agency to serve the larger ethical and intercultural goals of the Confucius Institute's both locally and globally.

10.8 TRUST

The relationships I had to each of these women, and our relationship to each other played out through this research in a variety of ways. As a researcher I had to decide what to put in and what not to include, sometimes based on the relationship I have with my participant and what I felt was appropriate. Often times off-the- record was more interesting but I only include things that are relevant. Part of my relationship to these women and the trust they have instilled in me is to recognize this fine line and adhere to our unspoken agreement about what is appropriate. Having said that, I also believe there was enough rich material in the interviews and the women were very forthcoming about how they felt on various subjects. But the trust factor for me played out in this way as well. While I allowed each of my participants to choose their pseudonym, I also gave each of them a nickname based on the interviews and the mood of the

day. I in turn called them, The Skeptic, The Friend, The Supporter, The Rock Star, and The Cautious One.

I had a specific kind of trusting relationship with each person which then manifested itself in our interviews and the write up of these narratives. With Jane it was recognizing that she was fine with being interviewed but depended upon the trust we had with one another that I would not write things that would compromise her position or our friendship. I felt this also applied to my relationships with Celia and Talley because I am so close to each of them, they were both very open and said things that I had to decide as a researcher what was appropriate to include and what I should leave out. For example, to include the dialogue regarding how Talley believed her colleagues in the school regarded her and her work, I asked Talley's permission to include those musings rather than just assuming she would be fine with those thoughts being included.

This decision-making process intersects directly with the idea of trust and how the trust I have with these women plays out in this research paradigm. On one hand, I want to give an accurate account of the narratives of each of these women. Yet on the other hand I must continually reconsider whether what they are telling me in some way compromises them, the work they are doing, or the trust they have in me to be honest but not put them in an awkward position. Some people were more forthcoming for different reasons. Talley was forthcoming because over the years we have discussed the premise for this research in a variety of forms. And in fact, it is my relationship with Talley in particular that helped me form a basis for what I felt needed to be studied and how I should approach this research. But that also means that Talley may have said things in the interview, despite being "on the record," that I chose not to

include because I know she trusts me not to put her in a position that would impact her work in a negative way

With Laura, she was open and fine with whatever I had to write about because, again, Laura trusts me to work from a position of integrity. Because over the years we have supported each other and have never taken each other's work or friendship for granted, Laura was comfortable with saying whatever she wanted. And Laura had much to contribute that was full of insight in a way that struck a balance between all her competing forces.

Sun also trusts me implicitly and I think for Sun the interview was a good opportunity to consider her own positionality from a perspective she had not voiced before. Sun's position too within the university, and her feeling that she was respected and valued as the Confucius Institute director and what else she brought to the university, also was at play for how open she could be in the interview.

10.9 CONCLUSION

Examples of collective power are pervasive and persuasive in our current political climate, from the Women's March to the attention in the media on sexual misconduct. But what these collective efforts say to me, based on this research, is that for some women one significant way to be heard, seen, or taken seriously is to intentionally form and sustain a collective that forces others to take notice. The liminal space as I define it here is real and persistent for the women of this study. It is a space of confusion, concern, disconnect, and isolation. But it is also a place from which the women of this study gain power and perspective. The voices of my participants give value to how negotiating that space in consortium with others helps, and specifically with

other peer women with whom they share the experience, eases ambiguity and gives strength and support when confronted by inequalities, frustrations, or road blocks. Their voices also confirmed and supported that which is gained by recognizing, giving voice to, and working within these in-between spaces.

In this way, each of us within the Consortium both understand the notion of the liminal space but concede to each other's sharing of that space as well. The liminal space creates a kind of struggle for each of us and yet, sharing that space from both a personal and professional standpoint helps each person to negotiate from a position of strength. For the women of this Consortium there is ambiguity, but there is also a thriving within the liminal space gained through this collective sharing of experiences and sharing of power.

One other significant finding from this research is that as much as the liminal space was a source of ambiguity, it also allowed the Sisters to have power and access in ways that may not have been available to them. The betwixt-and-between space allowed the Sisters to emerge as mediators and negotiators, and gave them status as brokers between their universities and Hanban, and their institutions and others outside the Confucius Institute network. This mediating capacity came with its own power and influence in that the Sisters were able to leverage, negotiate, educate, and influence others because of their ability to work within this liminal space.

I opened this chapter by using the metaphor of Japanese archery as a way to consider the overall framing of this thesis. The purpose of this research is to shift the dialogue regarding women and their negotiation of their multiple selves away from the tangible (target), and more toward the intersections which occur on the path (arrow flight) between their various and competing physical and ideological worlds. By emphasizing and naming the liminal space as the

central focus of this negotiation of women's selves, I believe this research opens another direction to consider women, women's voices, and the way in which the collective serves to help them each reaffirm and reconsider themselves to others and to themselves.

What I have also come to understand from this research is that even though physical situations may change for some Sisters, the impact of living within this liminal space is persistent, continual, and tenacious. Since I conducted these interviews, some Consortium members have had their Confucius Institutes moved to other departments or to other campuses. Yet, despite physical changes in their work environment, the internal/external negotiations remain the same for them. For example, I had a chance to check in with Celia since her interview and she confided that the physical shift onto the main campus and into a department which is more open to her work has certainly helped to ease some of the frustrations she felt in the past. Celia confided that the new administration is very supportive and she feels like her work is more valued at the new campus. But her own personal dilemma regarding work, self, and her "otherness" is something she recognizes is just part of who she is as a working woman, regardless of her role within the Confucius Institute. In this way, for Celia and the other Consortium members the fluid and open sense of how to negotiate within the liminal space creates an opportunity within this research. The feelings and negotiations for these women are as dynamic as the situations in which they work, yet the fact remains that negotiation in the liminal space remains constant even if their external situations change.

This research had an unintended and interesting consequence: By recognizing the liminal space and asking each of my participants to contemplate this space in their own words, in essence, lessened the impact of ambiguity, ambivalence, and competing tensions, and created for each of them and for myself constructive and collective ways of thriving. In this way, the

interviewing of the members of the Consortium solidified relationships that were strong to begin with and also conferred another level of legitimacy to the group and to their purpose.

While this study highlights the way in which the women of the Six Sisters Consortium organize, define, and maintain their work lives while negotiating conflicting ideas within structures, selves, and roles, I believe this research has created an opportunity for further study into adult women's friendships, the value of peer groups, and the power of feminist collectives as a means for women to develop and maintain agency. I believe the sustaining implication of this research is that by understanding and defining the role of the permanent liminal space as a real and persistent entity in the lives of these leaders, I have created an opening to understand and reframe the dialogue regarding inconsistencies and ambiguities in systems that may impact other women managers.

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